

SUBSTANCE AND SKEPTICISM IN HUME'S *TREATISE*

By

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## ***Abstract***

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1.4.5 of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* provides several reasons for close, sustained reading and general concern for interpreters of Hume. First, the question of the metaphysics of substance is a major issue for early modern philosophers. Second, in this section, Hume makes some of his most careful and dense arguments in the entire *Treatise*. The neglect of 1.4.5 has kept these arguments from receiving all the consideration that they deserve. Third, there are at least three novel positions that Hume argues for here that he does not argue for elsewhere.

I shall divide my project thematically with respect to Hume's arguments in 1.4.5. Chapter 1 details a series of arguments against the intelligibility of the concept 'substance'. Chapter 2 concerns arguments which attempt to conjoin the material with the immaterial. Chapter 3 focuses on the positions of Spinoza and those of the Theologians as regards substance and the immateriality of the soul. An amendment to the Theologians' arguments examines the advantage of substituting the concept of 'action' for the concept of 'modification' in arguments for the existence of substance. Hume rejects both Spinoza's position and that of the Theologians, as well as their proposed amendment. Chapter 4 is directed at arguments against the possibility of matter causing mind and Hume's defense of the contrary. Finally, Chapter 5 turns briefly to the implications of 1.4.5 for 1.4.6, *Of personal identity*.

In memory of Ewing B. Hight

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I want to thank Jack Bricke for being a stalwart supporter of mine since my coming to the University of Kansas. Jack has been a great stimulus for philosophical reflection. I have learned more from him during our conversations than I ever hoped to learn from any one source. He has been the chair of all three of my oral defenses; because of Jack I have always been fully prepared. He has been a good friend as well. I owe most of my success so far to him.

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## ***Table of Contents***

<i>Introduction</i>	1
CHAPTER 1: <i>Hume's arguments against the intelligibility of the notion of substance</i>	17
CHAPTER 2: <i>Hume's arguments against local conjunction</i>	38
CHAPTER 3: <i>Hume's arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians</i>	62
CHAPTER 4: <i>Hume's arguments concerning mind/matter causation</i>	95
CHAPTER 5: <i>The relationship between 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 of Hume's Treatise</i>	111
<i>Bibliography</i>	125

## *Introduction*

### **1. An introduction to the project**

My dissertation will focus on the arguments and themes of 1.4.5 of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, titled *Of the immateriality of the soul*. This is an often neglected section of Hume's *Treatise*. When it is given any treatment at all, the traditional approach to 1.4.5 is to treat it as stage-setting for what follows in 1.4.6, where Hume provides his infamous account of personal identity. I believe this approach is fundamentally mistaken and has discouraged careful readings of 1.4.5.<sup>1</sup> Rather than clearing the path for the approach of Hume's account of personal identity, 1.4.5 is where he establishes his primary, fundamental skeptical position regarding substance; what follows in 1.4.6 is but an implication of the conclusions of the previous section.

1.4.5 provides several reasons for close, sustained reading and general concern for interpreters of Hume. First, the question of the metaphysics of substance is a major issue for early modern philosophers. Each of the major so-called "Rationalists" (Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz), as well as the so-called "Empiricists" (Hobbes, Locke, and Berkeley), take important stances on the nature of substance.<sup>2</sup> Fitting Hume into the

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<sup>1</sup> The two exceptions to this generalization are John Bricke and Daniel E. Flage. I have made substantial use of their books: *Hume's Philosophy of Mind* and *David Hume's Theory of Mind* respectively.

<sup>2</sup> It will become apparent throughout the course of the dissertation that I owe a considerable debt to Justin Broackes regarding issues of substance. His paper, "Substance", has given me a nice framework to use as I consider Hume's various arguments concerning substance in 1.4.5. I agree with Broackes' analysis that the early moderns, beginning with Descartes, seriously misread Aristotle on substance, developing a metaphysical doctrine that was in most ways doomed for disaster. Descartes cleared the way for much of the confusion that followed him by discounting individuals as primary substances (as Aristotle had intended) because of their ultimate dependence on God for their existence; thus, making God the only true primary substance. This move of Descartes' proved to have incredible

philosophical milieu of his period stands as a worthwhile task; especially given the radical posture he takes with respect to the issue. On a related note, Hume explicitly mentions, and then argues against, the philosophy of Spinoza, as a means of arguing against other Defenders of Mental Substance. Nowhere else in Book 1 of the *Treatise* does Hume take the time to directly address the views of another philosopher.

Second, in this section, Hume makes some of his most careful and dense arguments in the entire *Treatise*. The neglect of 1.4.5 has kept these arguments from receiving all the consideration that they deserve. Hume uses in the course of this section nearly every fundamental principle at his disposal. He generously applies his Copy Principle, his Separability Principle, and his principle of Constant Conjunction; he also uses his doctrines of specific difference and real existence, and he keeps his inquiry in check all along with unrelenting skepticism. Also, Hume argues for and then implements a principle that he does not elsewhere in his works make explicit; this is what I call his Asymmetry Principle.

Third, there are at least three novel positions that Hume argues for here that he does not argue for elsewhere. The first of the positions is the main concern of 1.4.5: Hume's extreme skepticism concerning substance. Hume argues that no sense can be made of the definition of substance; that is, every account of substance (whether materialist or immaterialist), is ultimately unintelligible. Moreover, we cannot even attest to having a coherent idea of substance. Hume holds that there is no way to recover the notion of substance from absolute obscurity, and he

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ramifications. The stances on substance by all of the subsequent major philosophers mentioned above derive from Descartes' distinction, either as self-conscious developments (Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz) or reactionary responses (Locke and Hume). (I left Berkeley out because it's a rather difficult question to answer concerning to which group he most appropriately belongs concerning the metaphysics of substance, seeing as though he accepted *pace* Descartes immaterial substances and rejected *contra* Descartes material substances.) I also agree with Broackes that the original notion of substance found in Aristotle is an important one to include in even our own metaphysical discussions, and that an understanding of how the notion of substance became corrupted during the early modern period is indeed instructive. See Broackes, "Substance".



thoroughly examines and, then, rejects all arguments that purport to do this. The second novel position is his Perception-Dualism. Hume argues that perceptions fall into two basic types: extended and unextended. This position is entirely distinct from Descartes' Substance-Dualism, Spinoza's Mind/Body Parallelism and Dual Aspect Account, Hobbes' Material Atomism, Leibniz's Idealistic Monadism, and Berkeley's Immaterialism.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the third novel position argued for in 1.4.5 is that not only is it logically or metaphysically possible that matter causes mind, but that if we accept constant conjunction as the only proper account of causation, then we also have indeed good reason to assert that there is indeed mind/matter causation. Locke, famously, does not rule out such a possibility; however, he does not go nearly so far as Hume does in adumbrating the reasons that the possibility may be realized, let alone in arguing to the conclusion that we must accept that this possibility is realized.

## **2. The dissertation's strategy**

I shall divide my project thematically with respect to Hume's arguments in 1.4.5. The first division details a series of arguments against the intelligibility of the concept 'substance'; I will call these Hume's Intelligibility Arguments, or IA. The second concerns arguments which attempt to conjoin the material with the immaterial; I will call these Hume's Local Conjunction Arguments, or LCA. The third focuses on the positions of Spinoza and those of the Theologians as regards substance and the immateriality of the soul.<sup>4</sup> An amendment to the Theologians' arguments examines the advantage of substituting the concept of 'action' for the concept of

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<sup>3</sup> Hume's extreme skepticism leads him to conclude that all such metaphysical doctrines concerning substance are extravagant and indefensible.

<sup>4</sup> The Theologians are never specifically named, but, by what Hume says about them, he seems to intend 'theologians' to refer to philosophers such as Descartes, Malebranche, Arnauld, Cudworth, and More.

‘modification’ in arguments for the existence of substance. Hume rejects both Spinoza’s position and that of the Theologians, as well as their amendment; I will call Hume’s arguments here his Arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians, or AST. The fourth is directed at arguments against the possibility of matter causing mind and Hume’s defense of the contrary; I will call these Hume’s Arguments concerning Mind-Matter Causation, or AMMC. The final stage of my project will be then to turn briefly to the implications of 1.4.5 for 1.4.6. In each of these divisions, I will follow the pattern of (1) – (3) as sketched just below. Each of these divisions represents a chapter of my dissertation.

I shall do the following three things in each division: (1) I will lay out the arguments; (2) I will explain their role in the general argument of 1.4.5; and (3) I will evaluate them and their merits. In part, because of 1.4.5’s almost total neglect in the secondary literature, I will proceed by means of rigorous analysis of the arguments Hume offers—many of which are quite complicated and even at times arcane—and of exposition of Hume’s fundamental principles. In so doing, I will move from the particulars of a given argument to its function in Hume’s general rejection of substance and endorsement of wholesale skepticism with regards to substance.

The arguments of 1.4.5 also serve as presentations of Hume’s methodology in miniature. I will trace his methodology throughout 1.4.5 by paying close attention to the methods of each discrete argument, showing how they are of a piece with the general methodology of the *Treatise*. In the end I will connect the conclusions of 1.4.5 with Hume’s naturalistic project of a science of human nature kept in check by skepticism. Of special importance will be how my treatment of Hume’s arguments in 1.4.5 severely constrains the possible views we can attribute to him in 1.4.6, *Of personal identity*.

### 3. An overview of the chapters of the dissertation:

Chapter 1: *Hume's arguments against the intelligibility of the notion of substance*

#### Brief Preliminary Account of the Problem<sup>5</sup>

As a preliminary to the divisions of Hume's arguments, I will sketch Hume's diagnosis of why the subject matter of the mind has appeared confused and contradictory. Hume claims that philosophical accounts of the external world, and of matter in particular, have presented "contradictions and difficulties" (T 1.4.5.1). And, since this is the case, we should then expect accounts of mind to be even worse: "obscure, and uncertain" (T 1.4.5.1). However, such expectations are misguided. Accounts of mind, though subtle, are not riddled with contradictions like accounts of the external world are. Knowledge of mind (and of the mental generally) agrees with itself, i.e. coheres, and what is unknown is, perhaps, beyond our ken. Since this is the case, all of the seeming inconsistencies concerning issues of the mind are traceable to our theories not to the phenomena. Hume uses the philosopher's notion of substance as an object lesson. In short, 1.4.5 is partly a demonstration of Hume's aversion to unnecessary metaphysical speculation. His contention is that such speculation is not required for an accurate, naturalistic account of human nature, and, moreover, it often obscures what is necessary. (T 1.4.5.1 – 2) This leads Hume to the adoption of his radical metaphysical minimalism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 1 will treat of the preliminary account of the problem and the Intelligibility Arguments. I have separated them here for the purposes of making clear that there are two issues broadly speaking that are the concern of Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> Since Hume's skepticism is an epistemological position, it is only natural that he therewith evinces an attitude of some disdain for the extravagancies of nearly all metaphysical speculation, theories of substance being instances of this *par excellence*.

### The Intelligibility Arguments

Hume makes several arguments all directed at the intelligibility of the philosophers' supposed idea of substance. His strategy is to raise a kind of challenge for his interlocutors—that is, for the Defenders of Mental Substance, material or immaterial. By invoking both his Copy Principle and his Separability Principle, Hume believes that his interlocutors have no means by which they can answer the challenge.<sup>7</sup> Further, by his interlocutors' own lights, the definition of 'substance' is too far-reaching, applying to everything and thereby rendering it unable to mark the difference between substance/property or essence/accident. Hume uses a *reductio ad absurdum* to make this point clear.<sup>8</sup> Reflection on the nature of perceptions, according to Hume, reveals that they do not stand in need of support for existence from anything else, so we may conclude that our idea of inhesion is also unintelligible. (T 1.4.5.3 – 6)

Some serious questions are raised by these arguments. Are these reasons for rejecting any and every notion of substance as unintelligible? Or, rather, are these reasons for rejecting the Copy Principle and/or the Separability Principle? Of course, in principle, Hume answers the former question in the affirmative and the latter in the negative. The emphasis though has to be put on 'in principle', because nowhere in the text does Hume seem to really consider the latter question. It is precisely for issues of substance, abstraction, and so forth that philosophers like Descartes and Spinoza appealed to innate ideas. Hume's inattention to the significance of this, in

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<sup>7</sup> The Copy Principle states that no idea can be in the mind without first being copied from a precedent impression. The Separability Principle states that for any two things, if they are different, then their difference entails distinguishability. That is, they can be distinguished in virtue of this difference. And, if this is so, then the imagination can separate the difference—presumably some property or set of properties—from the things. considered. My treatment of these principles follows Garrett's in his book *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*.

<sup>8</sup> There are issues here concerning Hume's empiricism. Many of his interlocutors (e.g. the Theologians) would not accept his Copy Principle, happily appealing to innate ideas. So, unless Hume holds that the Copy Principle is undeniable on the part of these interlocutors, he cannot leave this argument as it is and expect it to convince them.

much the same way Locke and Berkeley similarly misunderstood or even failed to notice it themselves, requires explanation.<sup>9</sup>

The bottom line for Hume is that if the concepts of substance and inhesion are unintelligible, then he has sufficiently proven their expendability for his proclaimed project: the development of a science of human nature. These concepts are not necessary; so yet again we have philosophers' theories spilling unnecessary ink into an otherwise limpid pool. As he often does, Hume brandishes skepticism as a philosophical tool to keep our metaphysical speculation to a minimum: theorize only where there are data to be explained and do not commit yourself any further than the data allow. This is a nice example of Hume's methodology, one using skepticism as the compass and map of the territory of naturalism. Metaphysical questions about inhesion and substance caused all the confusion, not the nature of perceptions; we can see that if we carefully attend to the concepts themselves.

## Chapter 2: *Hume's arguments against local conjunction*

### The Local Conjunction Arguments

Hume believes that his arguments against the intelligibility of the concepts SUBSTANCE and INHESION were sufficient, as far as they go. However, in the spirit of thoroughness, he decides to examine the particular arguments of his interlocutors, both materialist and immaterialist. Each

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<sup>9</sup> By the Rationalists' reckoning we have metaphysically important ideas the content of which cannot be explained away by appeal to the senses or imagination. They argue transcendently that since we have these ideas *and* they cannot be accounted for otherwise, then we must have a separate faculty—the intellect—that allows us to comprehend such innate ideas the content of which outstrips all possible experience. Empiricists, on the other hand, have always struggled to make sense of these ideas; and because of their *a priori* commitment to some form of Locke's *tabula rasa* thesis, they have been unwilling to countenance the possibility of innate ideas. This has led Empiricists to defend various abstraction theses (the most popular of which goes back to Berkeley and is also cheerfully endorsed by Hume) that have failed to persuade many besides their own champions.

of these arguments in turn founders on absurdity, inconsistency, or contradiction—confirming his initial conviction. Hume uses each stage of his general argument against substance to also make distinctions that expose the true nature of the mind. In this way Hume has a two-fold purpose: the first negative, to refute the arguments of his interlocutors; and the second positive, to expose his interlocutor’s mistakes in order to facilitate a better understanding of the mind.

A misunderstanding of the basic ontology of perceptions leads us to a false taxonomy of material substance/immaterial substance. In consequence, some philosophers have argued that the soul must be immaterial. Hume lays out their arguments and demonstrates that they entail no such conclusion. In fact, the data only support a division among perceptions—those that are extended and those that are unextended—not a division among substances.<sup>10</sup> No appeal to substance is needed to make sense of the data. All we have evidence of is that some perceptions are extended and some are not; hence, Hume’s doctrine of Perception-Dualism.<sup>11</sup> In defending his doctrine of Perception-Dualism, Hume extracts another basic principle: “*that an object may exist, and yet be no where*” (T 1.4.5.10).

In Hume’s assessment of the arguments of his interlocutors he asserts that these philosophers were so misguided by the concept of substance as to deny the obvious—that is, that some perceptions are extended. We do not need to bring the concept of substance to bear on the data in order to take proper stock of the situation—in fact, quite the opposite is true. Reduction of the mind, i.e. its perceptions, to either an immaterial or material substance, is equally excessive. (T 1.4.5.7 – 10)

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note here that Hume is using ‘extended’ to mean *exists somewhere* or *has spatial location*, and he uses ‘unextended’ to mean *exists nowhere* or *has no spatial location*.

<sup>11</sup> I owe much of what I have to say about this doctrine to Flage. In Bricke’s book *Hume’s Philosophy of Mind*, he attributes to Hume some form of dualism, but leaves most of its details unspecified. I argue that Perception-Dualism is the form of dualism Hume ultimately endorses. And that this is best explained in terms of Hume’s Pyrrhonian skepticism.

Hume then turns to a thought-experiment to illustrate how it is that we manage to talk ourselves into appealing to concepts like SUBSTANCE and INHESION. We think that just because a perceived unity—for instance, a fig taken as a mind-independent object—seems to have many disparate properties that there is something additional that has those properties. But this is a mistake. All we have to go on are our perceptions. Some of those perceptions exist somewhere; the fig's surface touches the table. Some of those perceptions exist nowhere; the fig's sweetness touches nothing. The former perception enters into many spatial relations with the other objects in the room; the latter does not. It is an illusion to think that there is some one thing that is both sweet and has a surface touching the table, above and beyond our perceptions as it were. It is an inference we are not licensed to make. Further, there is an available explanation. The sweetness of the fig and the surface of the fig are related through their being co-existent in our perceptual representations and co-temporary in the succession of our perceptions. That is, they are associated by relations of causation and contiguity as perceptions in our mind, but not as spatially related perceptions inhering in the same substance.<sup>12</sup> (T 1.4.5.11 – 14)

### Chapter 3: *Hume's arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians*

#### The Arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians

Hume applies the lessons learned, from the foregoing considerations of the local conjunction of what's extended with what's unextended, to the case of Spinoza and his critics, namely the Theologians. That is, Hume uses Bayle's objections, accepted by the Theologians, to Spinoza's

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<sup>12</sup> Hume's doctrine of Perception-Dualism seems to conflate the ontology of perceptions with the content of perceptions. Hume shares this with Berkeley who makes a similar mistake in his arguments. Russell discusses this in the chapter "Idealism" in his book *Problems of Philosophy*.

view of substance to show that their own accounts of substance are open to exactly the same criticisms: both camps reduce a set of discrete entities to “one simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance” (T 1.4.5.21).<sup>13</sup>

Hume outlines the three traditional objections to Spinoza’s account of substance.<sup>14</sup> Hume concludes that they are sufficient for rejecting Spinoza’s account. However, if they are sufficient reasons to reject Spinoza, then they are also sufficient for rejecting the Theologians’ accounts of substance. (Hume’s representation of Spinoza fails to catch some of the subtleties of Spinoza’s philosophy; in particular, Spinoza’s explanation of what ‘simple’, ‘uncompounded’, and ‘indivisible’ mean when applied to the issue of substance.)<sup>15</sup> Hume charges that Spinoza’s atheism lies in positing some fundamentally simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance for things to inhere in, which is exactly how the Theologians make sense of the relation between perceptions and the underlying mental substance. If Spinoza’s doctrine is atheistic, then so are their accounts of substance. These arguments, again, put the Copy Principle to work, while at the same time articulating and using what I call his Asymmetry Principle.<sup>16</sup> (T 1.4.5.20 – 26)

Hume allows for the possibility that the Theologians may change tack and attempt to rescue some of these arguments by substituting ‘action’ for ‘modification’. The basic idea is that, while Hume’s criticism of their accounts of substance turned on the concept of modification as it

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<sup>13</sup> The Theologians, broadly construed, are immaterialist Defenders of Mental Substance. (See Norton and Norton)

<sup>14</sup> Each objection can be traced back to Bayle. Bayle uses these objections in his attempt to refute Spinoza in his famous *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Hume, it appears, never read Spinoza. He came to Spinoza only through Bayle’s article. (See Kemp Smith, Norton and Norton)

<sup>15</sup> My interpretation of Spinoza is in line with Carriero, Broakes, Nadler, and Melamed. I, like them, reject Curley’s and Allison’s interpretation of Spinoza and substance. Also, I endorse Broakes’ analysis of substance in early modern philosophy; because of this I will treat Hume as seriously misunderstanding both the motivation for his interlocutors’ defense of substance and their analyses of the concept and its role in metaphysics.

<sup>16</sup> This principle has to do with our epistemic position with respect to hypothesized mind-independent objects. We may infer from the qualities of our perceptions how supposed mind-independent objects may be, but we cannot infer that all properties of these mind-independent objects will show up at the level of perceptions. This claim also works in the service of Hume’s skepticism about mind-independent objects.



relates to the concept of substance, 'action' ought to be the preferred term and is not susceptible to Hume's arguments when inserted into the premises of their own arguments, *mutatis mutandis*. Hume argues otherwise. Not only does Hume state that such a replacement would not repair their broken arguments, but that, even if it did, the same move is open to Spinoza; so, this tactic, in principle, could only provide succor to the Theologians by also doing the same for Spinoza. (T 1.4.5.27 – 28)

This is the only section in Hume's *Treatise* where he deigns to name his opponent and engage the opponent's philosophical doctrines head-on. One explanation of this is simply Spinoza's popularity as a common opponent in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, but there were many common opponents in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, depending upon your stance. Hume does not directly engage any of those philosophers; so, it is reasonable to conclude that Spinoza was something of a special case for Hume. Another more interesting possibility is that Hume recognized, albeit in an ostensibly partial manner, that Spinoza's philosophy was distinct and philosophically interesting. If Hume's skepticism about substance has a philosophical opposite, then the closest available position would be Spinoza's substance-absolutism (his unique brand of substance-monism).<sup>17</sup> By opposing Spinoza, Hume could accomplish at least two important objectives. In the first place, contrasting his view with that of Spinoza leaves no room for mistaking the radical nature of Hume's skeptical attitude towards substance. Second, Hume cannot be gainsaid by his detractors as maintaining an atheism akin to that of the Dutch apostate.<sup>18</sup> Hume, thereby, indicts them as being as profligate in their metaphysics as Spinoza is in his.

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, Hume's position on substance is epistemological and Spinoza's is metaphysical. But there are moments in the *Treatise* that Hume seems to be pushing a more metaphysical line, namely, that of substance-nihilism. However, Hume's position is best explained as a skeptical one—hence, an epistemological one. Still, Spinoza defends the most extreme of the metaphysical accounts of substance that Hume wishes to attack.

<sup>18</sup> At least this part of my conjecture is supported by the apologia Hume gives in the final paragraphs of 1.4.5.

## Chapter 4: *Hume's arguments concerning mind/matter causation*

### Arguments concerning Mind-Matter Causation

Hume moves on to a new topic: the inquiry into the cause of our perceptions. He reviews a common argument for the conclusion that matter cannot be the cause of our perceptions. Matter and motion can only be varied with respect to objects' positions and situations. A material object divides only into smaller material objects. If placed into a figure, then all that follows is figure or relation of parts. If you move a material object, all that occurs is motion and change. Further, we cannot conceive of difference in shape, size, motion, and direction of bits of matter ever causing anything other than more of the above. It is absurd to think that doing so could result in a sensation of pain, or a passion, or a moral reflection. Since this is so, we can conclude that matter cannot cause perceptions or thought. (T 1.4.5.29)

Even though this argument might seem compelling on its face, it is incredibly weak and easy enough to refute. Appealing to his conclusions about causation from earlier in the *Treatise*, Hume reminds us of the fact that we never perceive any causal connection except by means of constant conjunction. All objects which are not contrary are capable of constant conjunction. No real objects are contrary. *A priori*, anything can produce any other thing. "[W]e shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be betwixt them" (T 1.4.5.30). This, according to Hume, is sufficient reason to reject the conclusion of the argument of the previous paragraph.

Some have suggested that because mind and matter are such different substances that the causal connection that we experience is only explained by their union, *à la* Descartes. If we only

concern ourselves with the question of causation, then the answer is plain: material motion causes thought or, what is the same, perceptions. Yes, conceptual analysis informs us that mind and matter are different, but experience tells us quite simply that the one causes the other, and presumably, *vice-versa* for mind causing matter as well. (T 1.4.5.30)

Hume takes this opportunity to reiterate one of his fundamental principles, namely, his principle of constant conjunction. Hume sets up a dilemma. On the one hand, it could be the case that nothing can be causally connected except “where the mind can perceive the connexion in its idea of the objects” (T 1.4.5.31). That is, there can only be causal connections if they are discoverable *a priori*, i.e. conceptually. (Hume has, of course, already argued against this claim at length throughout Book 1, part 3.) On the other hand, it could be the case that causal connections are discoverable through observing constantly conjoined pairs of events. Hume argues that accepting the first option would be disastrous: we could not make sense of causation at all. Moreover, something like Spinoza’s doctrine would follow with its attendant impieties.<sup>19</sup> Because of the first option’s consequences, the second option is the only way to go. Thus we get Hume’s defense of causation through constant conjunction.

This section is important because it exposes the missteps of those who have tried to argue on the basis of a difference in substance, between mind and matter, that the one could not then be the cause of the other. If we pay close attention only to the data, and appeal only to principles of the utmost certainty, then we must conclude that extended perceptions and unextended perceptions are fundamentally different, and yet they most certainly do enter into causal relations with one another—nothing could be clearer from their observed constant conjunction.

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<sup>19</sup> Specifically, it would seem to entail that God is the cause of everything, including all of the evil and viciousness in the world. This is yet another objection to Spinoza’s philosophy raised by Bayle in his *Dictionary*. However, Hume also seems to have in mind the philosophy of Malebranche.

## Chapter 5: *The relationship between 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 of Hume's Treatise*

### Implications of 1.4.5, *Of the immateriality of the soul*, for 1.4.6, *Of personal identity*

Hume has argued against substance on the grounds of his radical metaphysical minimalism, within the broader context of his extreme skepticism, in 1.4.5. This position had not been previously defended in the early modern period. Its novelty is best seen in contrast with Spinoza's Substance-Absolutism (conceived of as a particular form of Substance-Monism). Hume's skepticism about substance deserves its due alongside monism, dualism, and monadism, which is not to say that the doctrine is any better than the others—only that it ought to receive the same attention. SUBSTANCE and INHESION are unintelligible concepts according to Hume. We can make do by attending only to that for which we have evidence—to our perceptions (impressions and ideas). All of the data concerning them permits no recourse to the existence of any metaphysical substance in which they must inhere. So, this is Hume's settled opinion on the matter. If we have no real idea of substance or inhesion, and we have no use for them in our accounts of reality, then we must proscribe all reference to them in our philosophy. Hume is not merely advocating that we evince a skeptical attitude toward substance; he is entreating us to abandon the trappings of it entirely. That being said, Hume's official view is epistemological, not metaphysical.<sup>20</sup>

It should come as no surprise that Hume's basic position is the one developed in 1.4.5, and that what follows in 1.4.6 concerning personal identity, is but a consequence of the earlier

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<sup>20</sup> That is, when Hume is taking full care in articulating his position, he avoids metaphysical pretensions. Hume sometimes allows his arguments to get away from him, and it is at these points he can appear to be arguing for a metaphysical conclusion, even if it's a negative metaphysical conclusion.

arguments. Hume's groping towards a bundle theory is his initial attempt to reconcile the conclusions of 1.4.5 with our ordinary talk of persons. A bundle of perceptions—connected by relations of resemblance and causation—is all we are allowed to infer on the grounds of our experience. Moreover, there is no substantial self, or mind, apart from the perceptions and their relations.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In my dissertation I analyze and explicate an important section of Hume's *Treatise* that has been neglected by most of the secondary literature. Those who have attended to 1.4.5 have done so merely to set the stage for what follows in 1.4.6. I contend that this is a mistake. Hume's skepticism about substance is an important doctrine in its own right, and his account of personal identity is but an implication of the more basic anti-metaphysical stance. In exposing the arguments of 1.4.5, I have detailed his novel principles used there. Further, I have situated Hume's arguments throughout 1.4.5 in the greater context of the early modern period. Lastly, I have connected the conclusions of his arguments and the methods of his argumentation in 1.4.5 with his project of developing a science of human nature.

By treating 1.4.5 thematically, with respect to the arguments therein, I will accomplish the above in stages, applying each of these considerations to the arguments under each theme respectively. This will allow me to pursue each argument theme on its own, while also providing

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<sup>21</sup> If this is correct, then a substantial amount of the secondary literature on Hume's account of personal identity will be in need of serious revision or outright rejection.

myself with a framework, in the end, to take stock of this section of the *Treatise* as a whole.

Thus, my enterprise can be taken as, in part, a demonstration of the methodology and principles of Hume's *Treatise* in miniature.

Finally, I shall at the appropriate points throughout this project connect Hume's arguments in 1.4.5 to those of 1.4, generally, and to those of 1.4.6, specifically, as a continuous development of his radical metaphysical minimalism. This view is Hume's attempt to use his extreme skepticism to trace the limits of philosophy. He intends to cast serious doubt on as many of the pretensions of metaphysics as he can, imploring us that "[w]hereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent", as Wittgenstein would have it.<sup>22</sup>

Hume's skepticism takes the form of an updated version of Pyrrhonian skepticism, permitting no assertions of truth, but only acquiescence into matters against which we cannot resist. However, in 1.4 of the *Treatise*, Hume's skepticism appears to sometimes stray into an updated version of Academic skepticism, dogmatically asserting that we cannot know this or that. He even sometimes seems to go as far as to intimate that there is no such stuff as substance. I think it is a mistake to attribute to Hume a metaphysical position on the basis of these dogmatic indiscretions. I contend that much of Hume's overreaching in these sections is a consequence of this second strain of skepticism in his philosophy. If Hume were careful, then he would cultivate only the Pyrrhonian skepticism, and refrain from all dogmatism, however negative it might be.

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to suggest that Hume accepts anything like Wittgenstein's Kantian mysticism about those things about which we cannot speak intelligibly. For Hume, our not being able to speak intelligibly about something entails, *a fortiori*, that we cannot think about it either. I think that Hume would have approved of the proposition expressed by it, without approving of Wittgenstein's mystical context.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Hume's arguments against the intelligibility of the notion of substance*

In this chapter, I will examine Hume's four Intelligibility Arguments (IA1 – IA4). In each case I will provide an account of the argument as I see it. I will then give what I take are Hume's reasons for thinking that each premise is true. I will conclude my treatment of each argument by raising objections available to his early modern opponents. IA1 – 4 are the central arguments Hume deploys against the various Defenders of Mental Substance, or DMS.<sup>1</sup> These arguments are quite compressed and require a good deal of unpacking to see just how Hume is making his initial case against substance. (1) IA1 aims to show that we do not have *a priori* grounds for having an idea of substance, i.e. we cannot produce a precedent impression of our idea of substance. (2) IA2 weakens the premises of IA1 to show that we do not have *a posteriori* grounds for having an idea of substance. (3) IA3 argues that the definition of 'substance' propounded by the DMS applies to everything; so it cannot even be used to make the distinctions the DMS wish to make. And, (4) IA4 takes as its first three premises the conclusions of IA1 – 3 and then argues that perceptions are individually self-sufficient and stand in no need of support from anything extra-perceptual. Hume concludes that there is neither metaphysical motivation for appealing to substance nor anything intelligible that can be done with any notion of

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<sup>1</sup> Though the title of 1.4.5 is *Of the immateriality of the soul*, Hume understands the central issue to be that of substance. Further, he focuses on mental substance, but it is clear from his arguments that he takes them to apply to all notions of substance whatsoever. So, while he does not mention physical substance explicitly in this section, he intends it to be within the scope of this discussion.

substance. Hume's suggestion is that we do without. It is important for us to place the Intelligibility Arguments in the context of this section before we explore their particular nuances.

## 1. Stage-setting

Section 1.4.5 of the *Treatise, Of the immateriality of the soul*, as its title suggests, concerns the general claim made by many that the soul is immaterial, but in many respects this is only obliquely the section's topic. Almost from the outset, Hume exchanges the question of the soul's immateriality for that of substance *simpliciter*. He thinks, in answering the requisite questions about substance, that the issue of the soul's being immaterial will thereby be settled.

Hume links the issue of the substance of mind with his previous discussion of issues concerning the external world in 1.4.2 & 1.4.4. He states that where the issues of the external world proved confounding and, ultimately, contradictory, the issues of mind are not fraught with the same difficulties. That is, the difference lies in the phenomena. Hume asserts that “[w]hat is known concerning it, agrees with itself; and what is unknown, we must be contented to leave so” (T 1.4.5.1). Hume claims that not only are all of our judgments about the external world necessarily speculative, but that even if we were to flirt with the notion of mind-independent objects, we could do so only via our mind-dependent perceptions, i.e. our impressions and ideas. By contrast, what we have with respect to the world of mind are the very same perceptions without the commitment to any significance beyond them—they are presentations, i.e. they are what we are minimally committed to, ontologically speaking, and are but the data of experience.



That is, we are in a position to comment upon their relations to one another, as well as being able to describe them as they are presented. This being the case, we have a field of inquiry, while at the same time lacking any need for metaphysical assumptions otherwise. To say that what is known about mind agrees with itself is just to say that it is given as a presentation. This is evidence of Hume's holding what has been called the Cartesian thesis, namely, that we cannot be wrong concerning how things seem to us as well as the additional claim that we have direct, perspicuous access to the contents of our mind.<sup>2</sup>

This is an important starting point for Hume in 1.4.5, because it allows him to utilize the full resources of his skepticism. By restricting our field of inquiry to mental phenomena we still have a great deal of data at our disposal, albeit phenomenal empirical data, to describe and examine as presented. Further, since we are not given any insight into the nature of things in-themselves as it were, we cannot hope to have knowledge therein; which is to say that we are to remain skeptical of all else. This also provides linkage with his naturalism, by way of limiting what we can assert to what we can describe as being presented to our minds.

In the following paragraph Hume states that "certain philosophers...promise to diminish our ignorance" concerning mind; however, he warns us that "I am afraid 'tis at the hazard of running us into contradictions, from which the subject is of itself exempted" (T 1.4.5.2). He names the defenders of material and immaterial substances alike as those certain philosophers.

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<sup>2</sup> This can also be taken as evidence that Hume is a Pyrrhonian skeptic, who acquiesces in his beliefs concerning the phenomena of perceptions; however, he in no wise assents to the truth of the propositions expressed by those beliefs. I believe that this interpretation is in fact the case. I will not make much of it in the body of this chapter of my dissertation. For the sake of easier exposition, I will depict Hume as treating perceptions as if they were the metaphysically neutral objects. However, it may just as well be the case that Hume is merely acquiescing to them as presented phenomena. (And, when I take up the issue of local conjunction in Chapter 2, I will have reason to make this more explicit.) This general line is taken by Donald L. M. Baxter in his articles "Identity, Continued Existence, and the External World", "Hume's Theory of Space and Time in Its Skeptical Context", and in his forthcoming "Assent, Reason, and Hume's Pyrrhonian Empiricism".

This is because they equally posit the existence of substance beyond that which we have evidence for, i.e. our perceptions. According to Hume, the phenomena of mind do not require metaphysical theorizing *per se*, but rather stand in need of careful description. These philosophers have not appreciated this point and have thereby produced their speculations only to needlessly complicate things. Therefore, the apparent contradictions in and between the theories of some philosophers of mind are nothing more than the artifacts of those selfsame unnecessary metaphysical theories.

The principal problem is that both sides of the substance debate assert that some sort of extra-perceptual stuff exists and it is through inherence that our perceptions are related to the aforementioned stuff. So Hume proposes the simplest means by which we can ascertain the truth of the matter: he asks what these philosophers mean by the terms 'substance' and 'inhesion'. Of course he remains exceedingly doubtful that they can answer these questions at all, let alone in a manner that dispels all confusion in their application. It is in light of these questions that Hume develops his Intelligibility Arguments, or, collectively, IA. The IA aim to demonstrate that the defenders of substance cannot even form a conception of substance, whether material or immaterial; which is just to say that the question of the soul's immateriality/materiality is an ill-conceived question *tout court*.

Hume tells us that the questions posed in 1.4.5 are quite similar to those posed earlier, in 1.4.2 & 1.4.4, which were directed at matter and body in an external world. Although he qualifies this claim by saying that "[b]ut besides that in the case of the mind, it labours under all of the same difficulties, 'tis burthen'd with some additional ones, which are peculiar to that subject" (T 1.4.5.3). Hume may be alluding, here, to the fact that there are certain constraints on how we answer questions concerning the mind and that those constraints, while endemic to the

mind, narrow the range of acceptable solutions to the problems we might find there. In what follows Hume suggests that one of these difficulties concerns the causes of our ideas. Here, as he has done at other points in the *Treatise*, Hume cites one of his fundamental principles, the Copy Principle, to aid in his analysis of the mind: “As every idea is deriv’d from a precedent impression, had we any idea of the substance of minds, we must also have an impression of it; which is very difficult, if not impossible, to be conceiv’d” (T 1.4.5.3). We’ll see that this principle figures prominently in both IA1 & IA2.

## **2. IA1: The *a priori* case against our having an idea of substance**

To say that we have an impression of substance is tantamount to saying that an impression represents a substance; that is, specifically, an impression *resembles* a substance. But surely an impression cannot resemble a substance, because “according to this philosophy, it is not a substance, and has none of the peculiar qualities or characteristics of a substance” (T 1.4.5.3). The basic point behind the argument is that Hume wants to demonstrate that the issue of substance is so obscure that one cannot even form a proper idea of substance, which one would think is required if the notion of substance is to occupy the pride of place that it does in the philosophies of his opponents. The first of Hume’s Intelligibility Arguments IA1 goes as follows:

### IA1

P1. If we have an idea of something, then we have a precedent impression of that same thing.

P2. We do not have a precedent impression of mental substance.

- a. The only means of representation for an impression is by resemblance.
- b. An impression cannot resemble a substance. (See RA below)
- c. So, our impressions cannot represent mental substance.
- d. Therefore, we cannot have an impression of mental substance.

C. Therefore, we do not have an idea of mental substance.

We can imagine two distinct camps of Hume's opponents to which IA1 is aimed—namely, the rationalist DMS and the empiricist DMS.<sup>3</sup> Hume seems to be assuming a general representational picture of the mind that is indifferent to the divisions between the camps, but quite apart from his own, and perhaps Berkeley's.

The first premise of IA1 is an instance of Hume's Copy Principle. That Hume is convinced of the Copy Principle's truth is obvious given the use he puts it to throughout the *Treatise*.<sup>4</sup> The problem is that in this case, because of the dialectic involving substance, he cannot assume that all of his interlocutors will accept it as true. As long as a defender of mental substance accepts something like the rationalists' line on innate ideas, they would happily deny the truth of the Copy Principle. It may be for reasons like this one that Hume so quickly turns to other arguments. However, before we look at those arguments, we should examine this argument a bit more closely; for, even if we narrow IA1's appeal to those of a more empirical persuasion, it is not at all clear that the argument is satisfactory.

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<sup>3</sup> Strictly speaking, both camps will further subdivide into materialist and immaterialist DMS.

<sup>4</sup> There is some question in the secondary literature as to the status of the Copy Principle. Garrett's defense of it as an *a posteriori* principle is quite compelling. I shall have no reason to press the issue one way or the other here. See Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*, 43 – 48.

If we consider the sub-argument for the second premise of IA1, the potential trouble is immediate. He needs premise two for his main argument to go through; however, the justification for that premise falls onto the back of the sub-argument (a) – (d). If we take stock of (a), we might, understandably, wonder: on what grounds does Hume expect to establish its truth? The answer to that takes a bit of detective work.

In the previous section, *Of the modern philosophy*, Hume has a bit more to say about why representation amounts to resemblance; that is, why he thinks that premise (a) is the case. There he states the moderns' position as follows:

'Tis certain, that when different impressions of the same sense arise from any object, every one of these impressions has not a resembling quality existent in the object. For as the same object cannot, at the same time, be endow'd with different qualities of the same sense, and as the same quality cannot resemble impressions entirely different; it evidently follows, that many of our impressions have no external model or archetype (T 1.4.4.4).

Hume seems to be alluding to an argument made by Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, defending the primary/secondary quality distinction. To make sense of Locke's comments on the matter, we might imagine, for example, a situation where someone being placed before three buckets of water. Directly in front of the person is a bucket of tepid water, on one side is a bucket of hot water and on the other cold water. If we submerged our hands at the same time into the two flanking buckets for a short while, and then subsequently placed them both into the bucket of tepid water, we would then come to experience different sensations from the same cause, i.e. the same mind-independent object (E II.viii.21: 139). For Locke, this kind of case is supposed to demonstrate the need for his primary/secondary quality distinction, because of the variability of our felt sensations and the assumed invariability of the mind-independent primary qualities. In other words, Locke is making the point that, for example, our ideas of the

tepid bucket represent it as having invariant primary qualities, but that our secondary qualities, having been caused by the same mind-independent object, have conflicting content. He assumes the causal picture of the mind he had developed to that point is broadly correct; so, the inference to the best explanation is that the secondary qualities are caused by but have different properties than the primary qualities. Hume is offering a fair reconstruction of what he calls the moderns' "fundamental principle"—that there is an in-principle difference between primary and secondary qualities (T 1.4.4.3). Also, he uses their language of representation, not because he thinks it makes sense (indeed, he doesn't believe it makes sense), but because that's the language that the moderns' use in their accounts of mind.<sup>5</sup> Further, the connection between mental representation and resemblance is made by Locke throughout the *Essay*.

Hume then makes quick work of the moderns' fundamental principle. His argument works by means of two stages. The first stage recalls Locke's kind of example. However, as Berkeley had previously demonstrated, Hume turns Locke's argument against him, and by extension the rest of the moderns. In the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley, in what has come to be known as his Variance Argument, argues that if we have different sensations from the, hypothesized, primary qualities, and we do not have innate ideas, then those sensations must have come from the primary qualities. However, that entails that we must attribute to those mind-independent objects contradictory primary qualities. Q.E.D., Locke's distinction ought to be discarded (DHP 1 [179]). I take it that Hume makes much the same inference and then states that:

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<sup>5</sup> Both Locke and Descartes hold representational accounts of mind, and *a fortiori* of ideas. Further, both philosophers make the primary/secondary quality distinction. So, it's reasonable for Hume to not treat the rationalists and empiricists differently. Whether Descartes connects representation and resemblance is immaterial, because Descartes has at his disposal the more powerful objection of the rationalist in denying the first premise of the IA1.

I believe many objections might be made to this system: But at present I shall confine myself to one, which is in my opinion very decisive. I assert, that instead of explaining the operations of external objects by its [the primary/secondary quality distinction's] means, we utterly annihilate all these objects, and reduce ourselves to the opinions of the most extravagant skepticism concerning them. If colours, sounds, tastes, and smells be merely perceptions, nothing we can conceive is possest of a real, continu'd, and independent existence; not even motion, extension and solidity, which are the primary qualities chiefly insisted on (T 1.4.4.6).

The first stage is accomplished as soon as one realizes, as Berkeley had, that all qualities are, to use Locke's own criterion, secondary. At the second stage, Hume draws a different conclusion than Berkeley from the Variance Argument, detailing a much more radical upshot. Berkeley deftly attempts to avoid the pitfall of skepticism by famously invoking God as a meta-perceiver. Hume has no truck with that sort of solution and grimly stares down the obvious: we must embrace skepticism with respect to mind-independent objects. So, when Hume uses the notion of representation in premise (a) of IA1's sub-argument, he only does so because he's crediting his opponents with a representational account of mind. As the quotation from 1.4.4.6 makes clear, Hume, himself, would not characterize impressions as representational. Unless his empiricist opponents provide an account of representation that is not based on resemblance, it's not apparent what grounds they have for rejecting (a).

Premise (b) of IA1's sub-argument raises its own special kinds of problems. Hume's only explicit justification for (b) is that our impressions do not have any of "the peculiar qualities or characteristics of a substance" (T 1.4.5.3). It seems to me that Hume is appealing to the kind of inference that Berkeley made when arguing against matter in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Knowledge*. There, Berkeley argues that our ideas are immaterial and mind-dependent. And, by hypothesis, matter is material and mind-independent. So, continues the good Bishop, ideas and matter are utterly different. That being the case, he concludes that ideas cannot resemble matter, since they are utterly different (PHK 8-9). The implication is that we cannot

even form the idea of mind-independent matter except *via* our mind-dependent ideas; so, to say that we have an idea of matter is contradictory (PHK 10).

Now of course Berkeley's argument has been thoroughly scrutinized over the years. He seems to conflate the ontology of ideas, which may well be utterly different from the ontology of matter, with the content of those ideas. Taking another form of representation, a painting for instance, we might reply that a painting need not have the qualities of what it represents as the content of the painting. It seems Berkeley would have to accept this analogy, because even on his idealist ontology he would have to mark the difference between a painting of fruit and the fruit depicted. Paintings of fruit do not nourish, but fruit does.

If we look back now at premise (a) of IA1's sub-argument, Hume assumes that the only manner in which an impression could represent mental substance is through resemblance. But does Hume, when asserting premise (b), hold that resemblance must be taken as ontological resemblance? We know that for Hume substance, as depicted in his opponents' theories, has queer properties. But Hume cannot take for granted here that we do not have any ideas of substance, because that is precisely what is at issue in the argument proper. He seems to be saying that since his opponents grant that an impression is not itself a substance; the impression cannot, then, resemble a substance. But when he appends to this the claim that the impression "has none of the peculiar qualities or characteristics of a substance", Hume is operating with some idea of substance; namely, one that attributes to substance queer properties, i.e. his opponents' conception. He must mean here something like the following argument:<sup>6</sup>

#### RA

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<sup>6</sup> For simplicity's sake I'll call this argument Hume's Resemblance Argument, or RA.



P1. By hypothesis, substance has queer properties. (See IA1, P2b)

P2. By assumption, impressions do not have queer properties.

P3. So, impressions and substances are utterly different.

C. Therefore, impressions cannot resemble substances.

In this form the argument appears very much like Berkeley's. Some enthymeme seems to be informing both philosophers' arguments, which allows one to infer that resemblance is always and only a matter of strong ontological similarity. In short, Hume takes it that for two things to resemble one another that the resemblance must be some sort of strong ontological resemblance. But his opponents, by dint of holding a representational account of mind, certainly would not grant that all resemblance is strong ontological resemblance. The very notion that perceptions are often ontologically different from what they represent is part of what makes the view distinctive.<sup>7</sup>

Even if we grant the enthymeme, isn't Hume just making the same mistake that Berkeley did? Berkeley conflates ontology and representational content. There is a difference between what sort of thing an impression is and what content it has as a representation. And the very fact that Hume denies that our impressions have those aforementioned queer properties suggests that he *can* mark the difference. Because if we know that our impressions or ideas do not have those properties and we, at least by hypothesis, take substance to have them, then the only way we can, even by hypothesis, conceive of substance as such would be by our ideas or impressions of it.

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<sup>7</sup> I say "often" because we can have ideas about ideas; and these, as it were, second-order ideas *would* ontologically resemble what they represent. However, on empiricist views, these second-order ideas would take first-order ideas as content only if those first-order ideas had as content objects which *do not* ontologically resemble those first-order ideas.

Some might argue that Hume's problem in IA1 & RA comes down to his inability to dispense with the language of representation; thus, showing that his argument has over-reached. This is not fair, nor is it to the real point. It's not fair to Hume's argument, in that he is groping along with the language of representation only because that's the language of his opponents, as I've shown above. He only uses the framework of representation, then, by hypothesis; but in so doing, I want to claim, he cannot justify premise (b) of the sub-argument, which would then entail that premise 2 of the main argument is without defense as well. This speaks to the real problem with Hume's arguments, IA1 & RA. In IA1 Hume accurately sketches his opponents' assumptions and commitments, in particular their commitment to a representational model of mind. But Hume's key premise for justifying premise 2 of IA1—the claim that *we do not have a precedent impression of mental substance*—turns out to be premise (b) of the sub-argument—the claim that *an impression cannot resemble a substance*. Hume's reason for thinking that (b) is true depends on RA. However, RA assumes a non-representational account of impressions. In short, IA1 proceeds by means of assuming some sort of representational account regarding impressions, because Hume intends to draw his conclusion from his opponents' premises; but, in order for the argument in IA1 to go through, Hume invokes RA, which relies on a non-representational account of impressions. Unless Hume can justify (b) in some other manner than by appealing to RA, he cannot think that even his empiricist opponents will be convinced by IA1.

### 3. IA2: The *a posteriori* case against our having an idea of substance

The second of Hume's Intelligibility Arguments, IA2, is a substantial weakening of IA1. It relies on a challenge to the Defenders of Mental Substance. Hume's claim is that the burden is on them to produce and then explain the impression of mental substance. The argument seems to be:

## IA2

P1. If we have an idea of something, then we have a precedent impression of that same thing. (Same as IA1, P1)

P2. If we have an impression of mental substance, then the DMS could give a determinate account of that impression. Such an account could answer the following questions: how does the impression operate? From what object is it derived? Is it an impression of sensation or reflection? Is the impression pleasant, painful, or indifferent? Does the impression attend us at all times or only at certain intervals? If only at certain intervals, then which specifically, and by what causes?

P3. The DMS cannot determinately answer any of these questions, and cannot thereby give a determinate account of our impression of mental substance.

P4. So, we do not have good reason to think that we have an impression of mental substance.

C. Therefore, we do not have good reason to think that we have an idea of mental substance.

IA2 relies on the same first premise as IA1, but then changes argumentative tack.<sup>8</sup> As Hume puts it, the main shift from IA1 to IA2 is to exchange the question of "*What may or may not be?*" for that other *What actually is?*" (T 1.4.5.4). Hume takes it that his previous *a priori* issue can, *mutatis mutandis*, be replaced with an *a posteriori* issue to much the same effect. So, the burden of proof lies squarely on the side of the Defenders of Mental Substance to answer those questions. Hume does not think that they can; so, he concludes that even on this weaker set of assumptions his opponents cannot make intelligible the idea of mental substance.

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<sup>8</sup> This of course entails that if the initial rationalist objection to IA1 obtains there, it would obtain here as well.

Though the argument is admittedly weaker than IA1, it poses a serious challenge to, at least, his empiricist opponents. IA2 is not susceptible to the same objections I raised for IA1 on their behalf. I understand Hume here as simply using the empiricists' own logic against them. Since the supposed idea of substance is a holdover from the rationalists, the scholastics before them, and even the ancients before all of them, Hume's hostility to it should seem reasonable. The empiricists happily dismiss various supposed innate ideas proffered by the rationalists by similar reasoning as Hume here employs. Hume is just holding them accountable to their own empiricist standards. Their inability to produce any determinate account of the necessary precedent impression ought to provide us with excellent grounds for doubting that we have any such idea.

#### **4. IA3: The problems with the very definition of 'substance'**

The third of the Intelligibility Arguments, IA3, attempts to undermine the DMS' accounts of mental substance via their own definition of 'substance'. He imagines one of his opponents evading the questions posed in IA2 by directly appealing to the definition of 'substance'. The candidate definition is: "*something which may exist by itself*" (T 1.4.5.5). Hume then turns the definition on its head. He claims that "[s]hou'd this be said, I shou'd observe, that this definition agrees to every thing, that can possibly be conceiv'd; and that this never will serve to distinguish substance from accident, or the soul from its perceptions" (T 1.4.5.5). That is, the definition will fail to define anything, which one would expect (as does Hume indeed does) if the definition was defining something, ultimately, unintelligible. The proof for this goes as follows:

### IA3

- P1. Whatever can be clearly conceived could exist.
- P2. Whatever can be conceived as such could exist as such.
- P3. Everything that is different is distinguishable; and everything that is distinguishable can be conceived of as a separate entity.
- P4. Our perceptions, i.e. impressions and ideas, are different from one another.
- P5. So, our perceptions are distinguishable, and thereby separable by the imagination.
- P6. So, we can conceive of our perceptions existing in the absence of anything else in the same manner in which they actually exist.
- P7. The definition of 'substance': "*something which may exist by itself*".
- C. Therefore, by the DMS' own definition, perceptions are substances.

The first premise of IA3 provides the Criterion for Conceivability. The 'clearly' of premise 1 should be taken, minimally, as meaning consistent, coherent thought-experiments. I take it that Hume invokes the criterion as a recognizably "modern" principle, not likely to draw the ire of any of his opponents. The second premise is just Hume's own gloss on the first, stating the criterion specifically in terms of the properties attributed to the thing conceived of in the given thought-experiment. The third premise does most of the heavy-lifting in IA3. This is an application of Hume's Separability Principle. After the Copy Principle, the Separability Principle is Hume's most fundamental philosophical tool. Here, Hume intends by it that for any two things, if they are different, then their difference entails distinguishability by the mind—that is, the mind will take them as distinguishable. And, if this is so, then the imagination can detect the difference between the things under consideration—presumably some property or set of properties—and separate all of the distinguishable properties from one another. Premises 4 through 6, then, run the general argument of premises 1 through 3 for a particular instance,

perceptions. This is all a preamble to the introduction of his opponents' definition of substance, which, when taken with the foregoing premises, entails that perceptions are themselves discrete substances.

That the argument is valid is clear enough. But what are we to make of the conclusion? A case can certainly be made for the conclusion indicating a completion of a *reductio ad absurdum* of his opponents' definition of 'substance'. Hume expects them to recoil from the implication that perceptions themselves are discrete substances. Moreover, it doesn't take too much ingenuity to see that, if we substitute properties for perceptions, we can draw an analogous conclusion concerning the substance-hood of properties, which ought to prove to be equally disconcerting to his opponents—and, perhaps, to all of the rest of us as well.<sup>9</sup> Broackes criticizes Hume for making this very inference. He argues that,

The idea that one of my perceptions—that pain I had on Monday morning—could exist, on its own, as the one object in the world, is very probably incoherent, and Hume certainly fails in his arguments to defend it. My 'perceptions' are indeed often (though not always) independent of each other—in the sense that I could believe that *p* without believing that *q*, even though I actually believe both. But the implication that my belief that *p* is therefore a self sufficient object independent of everything else, and capable of existing on its own, is fallacious. Two dents in a car door may be independent of each other, in that each could exist without the other; but this does not mean that either could exist without the door.<sup>10</sup>

It seems to me that Broackes is correct in his judgment here; however, it is far from clear that Hume's opponents were any less likely to draw the same or analogous inferences. As Broackes himself points out, perhaps Descartes alone among them would have been the exception. To this point Broackes adds that,

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<sup>9</sup> In his paper "Substance", Justin Broackes argues that Hume's use of the Separability Principle in such places as at 1.4.5.5, where Hume makes 1A3, leads to a serious misconstruing of the notion of substance, in the philosophies of his opponents, by Hume. According to Broackes, because of this, many subsequent philosophers had taken Hume's lead and cast the requisite aspersions on the notion of substance; this being done in the absence of fully appreciating the role of the Separability Principle in Hume's attack on substance. Broackes, "Substance", 157.

<sup>10</sup> Broackes, "Hume, Belief, and Personal Identity", 202-3.

Descartes would deny the inference to the possibility of ideas' existing on their own without the mind whose ideas they are—for we do not have a clear and distinct conception of a thought without a thinker. Thought and thinker differ, as Descartes puts it, *modally*, and not *really*. Hume, on the other hand, though he usually demands a 'clear' idea, hardly treats this as a stringent additional demand; for him, whatever is distinguishable in thought (however casually) is separable, and may therefore exist separately.<sup>11</sup>

In the above passage the context of Broackes' comments is during a discussion of belief and personal identity, hence the reference to thinkers; but the point is well taken nevertheless.

Broackes insists there, and elsewhere, that Hume is fundamentally confusing the distinction between the subject—as the bearer of properties and the subject of predication—and the properties themselves.<sup>12</sup> Whether we are speaking of perceptions, properties, dents, or what have you, logically (and, *a fortiori*, ontologically) they are not the sorts of things that can have a self-sustained existence. However, Broackes thinks that there isn't some unperceived I-know-not-what that is the bearer of the properties in question, but merely the object itself. Apropos of all of this, I still maintain that Hume's use of the Separability Principle (however wrongheaded we may take it in the end to be) to draw this inference isn't outside of the orbit of reasonable principles of the early modern period.

The first two premises of IA3 are common enough in early modern philosophy to not elicit too many suspicious looks from that quarter; most early moderns held something like premise 1 to be true, and premise 2 is but Hume's explication of how premise 1 ought to be interpreted. It is the third premise which might be objected to; because, if the principles behind premises 1 through 3 are true, then the argument of four through six is but a particular case of the general principles laid down there; and, the definition of substance, given as premise 7, is one which Hume takes to be his opponents' own. The third premise of IA3 is Hume's notorious

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>12</sup> See Broackes, "Substance".

Separability Principle. That this is the premise that his opponents ought to attack may be the case; however, whether or not they would have principled reasons to reject it is still another matter entirely.

#### **5. IA4: The summation argument against substance and inhesion**

The DMS hold that perceptions exist only if they inhere in something extra-perceptual—namely, some sort of substance—which supports them. The DMS argue that since our perceptions exist, this extra-perceptual substance must exist. IA4 is Hume’s summary argument against the DMS. His contention is that if we can undermine their supposed motivation for invoking the notions of substance and inhesion with respect to perceptions, then their accounts are rendered otiose. Further, as IA1 – 3 have already shown, by their own assumptions and definition, the idea of substance is unintelligible. IA4, then, goes as follows:

#### **IA4**

P1. We do not have an idea of mental substance; such an idea is conceptually unintelligible. (IA1’s conclusion)

P2. Also, we do not *even* have good reason to think that we have an idea of mental substance. (IA2’s conclusion)

P3. The DMS’ own definition of ‘substance’ can be used to demonstrate that everything is a substance, e.g. perceptions, which would mean that we could neither mark the distinction between substance/accident, nor perceptions/soul. (IA3’s conclusion)

P4. Perceptions are all that of which we have ideas.

P5. Perceptions do not stand in need of support.



C. Therefore, with respect to perceptions, we have no need for, nor can make any intelligible sense of, mental substance or inhesion.

Premises 1 through 3 are the conclusions of IA1, IA2, and IA3, respectively. Hume renders his judgment on the state of his opponents' accounts of substance in the wake of IA1 – 3 when he says,

Thus neither by considering the first origin of ideas [IA1 & IA2], nor by means of a definition [IA3] are we able to arrive at any satisfactory notion of substance; which seems to me a sufficient reason for abandoning utterly that dispute concerning the materiality and immateriality of the soul, and makes me absolutely condemn even the question itself (T 1.4.5.6).

On the basis of these remarks, we can see that Hume intends to use the conclusions of IA1 – 3 to draw his general conclusion that we have no idea of substance, whether conceived as material or immaterial, and should therefore jettison it from our philosophy. That is, the so-called notion of substance is unintelligible.

Hume's next move—premise 4 of IA4—revisits RA, but makes a bolder case. He argues, in justifying premise 4, that, “We have no perfect idea of any thing but a perception. A substance is entirely different from a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of a substance” (T 1.4.5.6). First, I take Hume's use of the term ‘perfect’ merely to mean ‘intelligible’. Second, Hume pronounces here, quite enthusiastically, the claim that our only intelligible ideas are of perceptions. The significance of this is Hume's unabashed denial of there being any sort of representation beyond that of ideas. And, since ideas are themselves perceptions, Hume is here restricting our ontology to perceptions—even if he is only concerned with that ontology phenomenally. My earlier sketch of RA does not attribute to Hume quite so bold a thesis as he asserts here. The reason for this is because Hume was using his opponents' assumptions in

1.4.5.3, where he first intimates RA. In 1.4.5.6 Hume shifts into his own philosophical position. He has dispatched his opponents' accounts of substance in IA1 – 3; so he is free to return to his own mode, and its attendant assumptions, gathered through the foregoing sections of the *Treatise*. So, the syllogism above is Hume's argument *simpliciter*.<sup>13</sup>

Premise 5 of IA4 concerns inhesion as well as the further implications of IA3. Hume argues that, “[i]nhesion in something is suppos’d to be requisite to support the existence of our perceptions. Nothing appears to be requisite to support the existence of a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of inhesion” (1.4.5.6). That nothing is requisite to support our perceptions is entailed by the conclusion of IA3, because it was demonstrated there that the DMS’ definition of ‘substance’ applies to perceptions—counting them as substances, as it were.

By Hume’s reckoning, there is no philosophical motivation for either substance or inhesion, at least concerning our perceptions. In addition to this lack of motivation, we cannot even make sense of the hypothesized ideas of either substance or inhesion that are relayed to us by the theories of the DMS. Hume figures that he has refuted all claims of the DMS concerning substance and inhesion. So, if their arguments for the claim that the soul is immaterial rely on their accounts of substance and/or inhesion, then so much the worse for those arguments.

Let’s now take stock of Hume’s IA. We can see that IA1 has considerable problems facing it, both from his rationalist opponents and their empiricist counterparts—that is, from all of the Defenders of Mental Substance. IA2 is no more convincing to the rationalists than IA1, because

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<sup>13</sup> When I first introduced RA, I raised a problem for Hume (on behalf of his opponents) concerning RA’s reliance upon a non-representational account of impressions. Hume’s more succinct version of RA, quoted above, makes plain that this is the case.

it shares the same first premise; one the rationalists reject outright. However, the empiricists cannot cry foul regarding IA2; it makes no use of any notion of representation concerning impressions; and it poses a reasonable challenge to them. IA3, if sound, presents a serious problem to all of the Defenders of Mental Substance. There we judged that the Separability Principle was the key to the argument, but it's unclear what grounds his opponents have for rejecting it. IA4 assumes success in the cases of IA1 – 3. Setting IA1 aside, IA2 & IA3 pose daunting difficulties for his opponents. Further, it seems that IA4's conclusion still follows if we jettison its first premise (the problematic conclusion of IA1). I think Hume has made a compelling case for rejecting the ideas of substance and inherence, with respect to perceptions, as unintelligible. Hume's intent was to demonstrate that his opponents' views of substance and inherence were fatally flawed, ill-conceived, and superfluous to the project of providing a proper account of the mind. In making good on these intentions, I think Hume has done rather well.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Hume's arguments concerning local conjunction*

In this chapter, I will examine what I refer to as Local Conjunction Arguments, or LCA. After having attacked the Defenders of Mental Substance, or DMS, and their accounts of substance and inhesion, Hume muses on another set of considerations concerning the general issue of the immateriality of the soul. These considerations specifically cite the impossibility of locally conjoining, in their parlance, mind and matter. Hume reviews their argument, LCA1. For the most part, Hume accepts LCA1 as valid and sound, but rejects an implication of it that his opponents wish to draw. In fact, Hume will impress LCA1's premises into the service of his own project, drawing conclusions quite apart from his opponents' original intent. To accomplish this task, he recalls his discussion of space and extension from 1.2 of the *Treatise*. Armed with the conclusions he established there, Hume defends a radical thesis—"that an object may exist, and yet be no where", what I refer to as the 'non-location maxim' (T 1.4.5.10). Hume works out the implications of this thesis. He explains how his opponents' mistakes concerning local conjunction parallel mistakes we make in our daily lives; in light of this, we can see that, in both types of case, reason points to the non-location maxim. He then provides a psychological account of how we are led astray from the dictates of reason. This account is of a piece with Hume's other appeals to psychology in the face of metaphysical *conundra*. Using the maxim, Hume constructs his own Local Conjunction Argument, LCA2, which bolsters LCA1. Hume concludes that the LCA only entail a kind of dualism among perceptions—some extended, some

unextended—but do not entail the slightest thing concerning the substance of the soul. The upshot of the LCA is Hume’s unique doctrine of Perception-Dualism, the understanding of which will settle questions central to Hume’s model of the mind.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. LCA1: The received local conjunction argument and Hume’s initial assessment**

At the start of 1.4.5.7, Hume provides LCA1, which is an argument made by the immaterialist Defenders of Mental Substance. He introduces LCA1 by saying that “[t]here is one argument commonly employ’d for the immateriality of the soul, which seems to me remarkable” (T 1.4.5.7). I think it’s helpful to take LCA1 in three stages, LCA1a – c. This is mainly because the argument is a touch unwieldy otherwise. So, LCA1a goes as follows:

#### LCA1a

P1. If something is extended, then it has parts.

P2. If something has parts, then it is divisible. That is, it will be separable by the imagination and/or divisible in reality.

P3. Perceptions are indivisible and inseparable.

P4. Perceptions do not have parts.

C. Therefore, perceptions are not extended.

The argument appears innocuous by early modern standards. The main idea of the argument is the claim that perceptions are not extended, because of their inseparability and indivisibility. As

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<sup>1</sup> In discussing this same section of Hume’s *Treatise*, Daniel E. Flage describes Hume’s unique doctrine as “entity-dualism”. Since the only entities that Hume is interested in are themselves perceptions, I have chosen my own phrase to make this clear. I follow Flage’s interpretation on this issue without any other differences.

we'll see, the immaterialist DMS go on to argue that it's impossible to locally conjoin perceptions with anything extended. This impossibility is the focus of LCA1b. But before we turn to LCA1b, we should note that Hume explicates the immaterialist DMS' second premise of LCA1a, seemingly, in his own philosophy's terms. Appended to the claim that *everything that has parts is divisible*, Hume adds the qualification, "if not in reality, at least by the imagination", which makes use of the Separability Principle (T 1.4.5.7). Perhaps Hume believes that his opponents are committed to it by the way in which they reason. Even so, we can take Hume as pre-empting a certain sort of caviling response. The objection would be that *not all things that have parts can actually be divided into those parts*. Hume's built-in reply is that *that may well be the case, but even those things are capable of being imagined separately by the imagination*. Thus, Hume reasons, they are after all divisible; so long as we include the kind of division the imagination performs through separation. His only recourse for thinking that separability amounts to a form of divisibility is the kind of inference he relied on back when we made IA3. We might doubt though that by merely separating an object from its parts (or even perhaps from its properties) in our imagination that we have somehow proved that the object is indeed divisible.<sup>2</sup>

Once LCA1a is in place, Hume depicts the next stage of the immaterialist DMS's argument, LCA1b, in the following manner:

#### LCA1b

P1. It is impossible to conjoin something extended to something unextended.

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<sup>2</sup> Depending on the scope of 'parts' in Hume's argument, we might follow Broackes when he makes this very objection with respect to Hume's using the Separability Principle to divide the properties of a thing from the thing itself. The worry would be that just because there is a distinction of reason—our ability to consider the whiteness of the polar bear without attending to the polar bear itself *per se*—doesn't mean that there is, on the one hand, the whiteness of the polar bear, and, on the other hand, there is the polar bear itself. The polar bear and its whiteness are non-identical, but they are in nowise separable. Broackes, "Substance", 149-50.

P2. Perceptions are unextended.

P3. Bodies are extended, because they are divisible and have parts.

P4. So, it is impossible to conjoin a body to a perception.

C. Therefore, the soul must be immaterial, i.e. perceptions must inhere in an immaterial substance.

Obviously, the premise of LCA1b most likely to attract controversy is its first. Since LCA1c concerns the justification of that premise, I'll say a few things about the other premises of LCA1b before taking up the last stage of the immaterialist DMS's argument. The second premise is the conclusion of LCA1a. The third is another consequence of LCA1a, *mutatis mutandis*, for bodies and their attendant qualities. In justifying premise one of LCA1b, Hume uses LCA1c which states that:<sup>3</sup>

#### LCA1c

P1. If an extended object, X, is conjoined with an unextended object, Y, then Y "must exist somewhere within its [X's] dimensions."

P2. If Y exists within X's dimensions, then it must exist within a particular part of X or in every part of X.

P3. If Y exists within a particular part of X, then that part is indivisible.

P4. So, Y would be conjoined only with that part and not with its extension, i.e. no local conjunction between X and Y.

P5. If Y exists in every part of X, then Y must also be extended.

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<sup>3</sup> LCA1c is an elaborate argument for a claim that Hume's opponents likely take to be conceptual. Why Hume goes to this length in representing their argument is dark to me. It would seem that the immaterialist DMS could just as easily have argued that mind and matter can't be locally conjoined because that would entail that either mind be extended or matter be unextended, both notions being equally absurd. Since nothing like LCA1c can be found in the texts of Hume's opponents, it is probably the case that the argument-type that Hume refers to as "one argument commonly employ'd for the immateriality of the soul" is none other than some version of Descartes' argument for the Real Distinction: 1. Mind is not extended. 2. Body is extended. 3. Therefore Mind  $\neq$  Body. For example, Cudworth and Clarke have versions of the argument which expand on Descartes' quite simple one without improving it in any appreciable way. ( See Norton & Norton's editorial annotation to 1.4.5.7 in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, volume 2: *Editorial Material*, 796.)

P6. So, Y would also be separable and divisible, after the same manner as X.

P7. Premise five is absurd and contradictory.

C. Therefore, something extended cannot be conjoined to something unextended.

LCA1c justifies premise 1 of LCA1b by means of a *reductio* of its contrary—the claim that *it is possible to conjoin something extended to something unextended*.

The crucial premises of LCA1c are the third and fifth premises. Together they make explicit the metaphysical dilemma posed by the second premise. The third premise serves to rule out the dilemma's first option. If some perception (e.g. my impression of red at  $t_1$ ) exists within the dimensions of some particular part of an extended object (e.g. my favorite armchair), then my impression of red at  $t_1$  would not be conjoined to my favorite armchair, but only to that particular part. Since my impression of red at  $t_1$  is itself indivisible, Hume takes it that the particular part of my favorite armchair the perception was conjoined to would also then turn out to be indivisible. Hence, there would be no local conjunction of my impression of red at  $t_1$  and my favorite armchair. The fifth premise, then, blocks the second option. If, to use the same example, my impression of red at  $t_1$  exists in every part of my favorite armchair, then my impression of red at  $t_1$  would, like the armchair, be extended. However, as demonstrated in LCA1a, perceptions like my impression of red at  $t_1$  are unextended—thus, we have arrived at our *reductio*'s contradiction. In short, Hume is arguing that any possible local conjunction between mind and matter fails in one of two ways. Either you reduce matter to mind or you reduce mind to matter. Both options result in analogous absurdities: unextended matter or extended mind, respectively.

So, Hume has now laid out the immaterialist DMS' argument, LCA1, for the immateriality of the soul. Furthermore, according to Hume, his opponents understand the



immateriality of the soul as entailing the claim that *our perceptions inhere in an immaterial substance*. Since Hume has by this point in 1.4.5 demonstrated that the ideas of substance and inhesion are unintelligible and that there is no metaphysical motivation for them besides, we might wonder why he continues in this vein. Hume assesses LCA1 by stating that:

This argument affects not the question concerning the *substance* of the soul, but only that concerning its *local conjunction* with matter; and therefore it may not be improper to consider in general what objects are, or are not susceptible of a local conjunction. This is a curious question, and may lead us to some discoveries of considerable moment (T 1.4.5.8).

Hume's initial judgment is that LCA1 does not establish anything whatsoever about the substance of the mind, which his opponents understand as an implication of LCA1. Daniel E. Flage puts it that:

Hume recognized that if the conclusion is to follow from the premises there must be a suppressed substance-requirement premise, a premise he clearly rejected. Nonetheless, apart from this suppressed premise the argument points to an important conclusion: there is a class of objects that is incapable of local conjunction with extended objects.<sup>4</sup>

Since LCA1 raises some interesting questions concerning local conjunction, Hume sets out immediately to pursue the answers to those questions. The reason Hume refers to LCA1 as “remarkable”, when he initially sketches the argument at the beginning of 1.4.5.7, is not because it somehow advances his opponents' positions in an interesting manner, but rather that, when reconsidered and properly appraised, many, if not all, of LCA1's premises can be marshaled into working for Hume's own philosophy. We shall see that these “discoveries” are, for Hume, of the utmost importance, one of which being the distinction alluded to in the Flage quotation.

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<sup>4</sup> Flage, *David Hume's Theory of Mind*, 119.

## 2. Applying the lessons of space and extension to the issue of local conjunction

In 1.4.5.9, Hume looks more closely into the business of local conjunction. He hearkens back to some of the considerations he flagged back in 1.2, *Of the ideas of space and time*. Hume points out that only two of our sense-modalities are causally-related to the original formation of our ideas of space and extension—these being sight and feeling. Upon reflection we notice, also, that only our colored or tangible impressions convey to us our ideas of space and extension. Hume seems to conclude that we have little reason, then, for thinking our ideas of space and extension have any other source.

Before moving on though, Hume takes up several potential objections to this line of thought. One objection we might put into the form of a question: What about when we say things like “I have an increased relish for fried bananas today”? Don’t we implicitly accept that a passion like this relish, which we do not acquire through sight or feeling, carries along with it the ideas of extension and space? Hume’s appropriately brusque response is in the negative. That sort of talk is metaphorical at best and “’tis not after the same manner that we diminish or encrease any visible object” (T 1.4.5.9). This is a relatively simple and straightforward kind of confusion we make in our unreflective daily lives.

Similarly, another objection might go as follows: What about when we hear different sounds at the same time? Through our sense of hearing, don’t we come to hear things that are far-off or nearby, and don’t we then receive the ideas of space and extension therefrom? Hume’s reply treads familiar ground. It is only through custom that we come to associate sounds and the objects we believe emit them. Neither sound—whether near or far as their respective objects are

located in relation to us—transmits any notion of space or extension by means of our sense of hearing. Although, we *do* understand the objects (that we take to emit the sounds) as both being extended in space. We also take our bodies to be extended in that same space. Since the sounds we hear seemingly arrive through our sense of hearing after the time we take them to have been emitted, we infer that the transmission of that sound took time because it passed through space; and since we conceive of their objects as being of different distances from ourselves, we reckon that the sound of one is joined by the idea of relative nearness and the other of relative farness from us. However, those beliefs about what we take to be physical objects and our body, as being extended within the same space, are all and only formed by impressions received by sight and/or feeling. That time has elapsed between receiving the impression of the objects and the subsequent impressions of the sounds being heard simultaneously at some later time is but an inference we make on the basis of the succession and ordering of those received ideas. However, each element of our total experience is discrete; that we fail to comprehend this is explainable, given the complexity of our total composite experience.

Seeing the objects behave as they have on other occasions, where I subsequently hear their associated sounds, causes me to form the expectation of hearing a particular sound carried from each of them shortly thereafter. But my seeing the objects behave in their respective manners doesn't convey anything itself with regards to the sound. Further, I come to believe that these objects are within the same space as my body on the basis of impressions received by sight and/or feeling—plus the past association of a certain amount of elapsed time between the objects behaving as I see them and the sounds I hear afterwards. That conditions me to relate the impressions of sound, which carry no ideas of space or extension, with these other distinct impressions which do. Hence, I come to think of a sound heard faintly as coming from faraway

and another which is sharp as from nearby, but the impression of sound through my sense of hearing cannot alone account for my associating it with ideas of space or extension. Without all of my previous associations concerning the objects, relating sounds and supposed causal sources, I have no reason to think that my hearing or the sounds it impresses upon my mind inform me with respect to notions of space or extension.

Locke had argued to much the same effect in his *Essay*. There Locke was disputing others' claims that the idea of extension attended all other sensible perceptions. Locke responds by saying, "[t]hat had they reflected on their *Ideas* of Tastes and Smells, as much as on those of Sight and Touch; nay, had they examined their *Ideas* of Hunger and Thirst, and several other Pains, they would have found, that they included in them no Ideas of Extension at all" (E II, xiii, 24: 178).

Hume turns next to the general case of perceptions—including ideas, impressions, passions, desires, et al.—and their unsuitability for providing us with our ideas of space and extension through reflection upon their nature. That is, he explores the possibility that we may get our ideas of space and extension from reflecting upon perceptions themselves, rather than from their supposed causes. So, drawing out this objection, we are to imagine that somehow, when we reflect on our perceptions, we recognize between them a relation of space or extension. Against this, Hume argues as follows:

Whatever marks the place of its [the perception's] existence either must be extended, or must be a mathematical point, without parts or composition. What is extended must have a particular figure, as square, round, triangular; none of which will agree to a desire, or indeed to any impression or idea, except of these two senses [sight and feeling] above-mention'd (T 1.4.5.9).

Hume proffers a dilemma here that echoes the one he posed back in LCA1c. This time the incommensurability of perceptions and extension is shown through their necessarily not being figured, as it were. This rules out the possibility that perceptions are extended. Hume then argues against the remaining option:

Neither ought a desire, tho' indivisible, to be consider'd as a mathematical point. For in that case 'twou'd be possible, by the addition of others, to make two, three, four desires, and these dispos'd and situated in such a manner, as to have a determinate length, breadth and thickness; which is evidently absurd (T 1.4.5.9).

The possibility of perceptions (other than those received through our senses of sight and/or feeling) being mathematical points is ridiculous. Hume imagines his opponents citing his earlier defense of *minima sensibilia* to explain how we come to form the ideas of space and time. Hume argued there that it is from these *minima sensibilia* that we arrive at our ideas of space and extension in the first place—but, he's clear in 1.2 that only our impressions from sight and feeling can be conceived as *minima sensibilia*. So the objection might be developed that perhaps our perceptions should be treated quite generally as being *minima sensibilia* (not just those we receive through sight and/or feeling), thereby conceiving of them all as mathematical points, and so as sufficient for supplying us with our ideas of space and extension. As Hume pointed out in 1.2, a consequence of conceiving of impressions as *minima sensibilia* is precisely to take them to be the building-blocks out of which we get “determinate length, breadth and thickness”, which is contradictory if applied to the case of the other perceptions.

Hume concludes that none of these objections hit their mark: our perceptions only metaphorically have anything like magnitude; simultaneous sounds do not carry ideas of extension or space, but only seem to because of past associations and our habits formed thereof; and, finally, our non-visual and non-tactile perceptions cannot be taken on the same model of

*minima sensibilia* as our visual and tactile perceptions. So we can be assured that our ideas of space and extension arrive only via sight and feeling and their attendant impressions.

### 3. Hume's defense of the non-location maxim

In light of the conclusions drawn about the origins of our ideas of space and extension—while also keeping in mind the implications of LCA1 (properly understood)—Hume asserts that a certain metaphysical maxim is true. He argues that:

'Twill not be surprizing after this, if I deliver a maxim, which is condemn'd by several metaphysicians, and is esteem'd contrary to the most certain principles of human reason. This maxim is *that an object may exist, and yet be no where*: And I assert, that this is not only possible, but that the greatest part of beings do and must exist after this manner (T 1.4.5.10).

Hume takes as an upshot from his reflections on LCA1 and the origin of our ideas of space and extension that the other perceptions lack location while at the same time maintaining their existence. Locke himself, when discussing the complexities of memory and his empirical philosophy of mind, argues to a quite similar conclusion. Locke states that “in this Sense it is, that our *Ideas* are said to be in our Memories, when indeed, they are actually no where, but only there is an ability in the Mind, when it will, to revive them again” (E II, x, 2: 150). Hume, though, goes on to explicate the matter further with much more precision than Locke's passing remark. Hume holds that:

An object may be said to be no where, when its parts are not so situated with respect to each other, as to form any figure or quantity; nor the whole with respect to other bodies so as to answer to our notions of contiguity and distance. Now this is evidently the case with all our perceptions and objects, except those of sight and feeling (T 1.4.5.10).

All of our perceptions, except those derived from sight and feeling, we have found to be neither mathematical points nor extended objects within space; so, we must conclude, that those perceptions have no location at all. The notions of position and place are antithetical to the very nature of non-visual or non-tactile perceptions.

In closing 1.4.5.10, Hume puts his argument in yet another way to cut off a certain sort of objection. He imagines an objector saying that what the maxim entails is absurd. Hume's clever pre-emptive response is that, given the assumptions of the immaterialist DMS, they would already have had us embracing what is contradictory—that these non-visual and non-tactile perceptions have location. However unsettling the implications of Hume's maxim appear to his opponents, they do not lead to any contradictions. He runs us back through one of his favorite thought-experiments when he states that “[i]f they *appear* not to have any particular place, they may possibly *exist* in that same manner; since whatever we conceive is possible” (T 1.4.5.10). Since there's no contradiction in conceiving of these perceptions existing without location, we can safely infer that it is possible that this is the case. So, Hume's maxim fares much better than the assumptions made by his opponents to the contrary.

In the next paragraph Hume makes a passing remark of some note before turning to the example of the fig. He declares that we do not need to investigate the case of local conjunction between those aforementioned perceptions (without location) and matter. The reason is that, as Hume puts it, “'tis impossible to found a relation but on some common quality”, and the class of perceptions without location and the class of material objects share no common properties (T 1.4.5.11). In short, it seems that Hume is appealing to the *a priori* concepts which individuate the

members of each class respectively and by means of which we can adjudge their conceptual incongruity.

#### **4. The fig example**

In order to make his point plain, Hume sets out to show how we can arrive at his non-location maxim without troubling ourselves about abstruse metaphysics but merely by attending to what is right before us in our experience. He thinks that careful attention to how we form complex ideas informs us of all we need to know about the non-locality of some of our perceptions. Hume frames his discussion of this around his thought-experiment of the fig, where we have a composite experience of many complex perceptions we take as representing a unity, namely the fig itself.<sup>5</sup> We are to suppose that this is the content of our present experience. Clearly our composite experience of this is made up out of many discrete perceptions. By analyzing how we come to have this composite experience, Hume intends to deconstruct it into its constituent components—our perceptions, the sense-modalities from which we receive them, constant conjunction, custom, and the relations of causation and contiguity in time.

Hume has us imagine a table with a fig and an olive placed on top of it. The fig and the olive rest at opposite ends of the table. We are likely to note, almost immediately, that the two things have quite different relishes, or tastes—the fig’s sweetness and the olive’s bitterness.

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<sup>5</sup> I could have just as appropriately called it the “fig and olive example”. I call the thought-experiment the “fig example” because, after Hume initially describes the case in terms of the fig and an olive on a table, Hume settles on the example of the fig in the subsequent paragraphs as he develops his argument. The example of the fig serves him as a touchstone as Hume analyzes our composite experiences.



Also, we naturally incorporate our perceptions of the different relishes with other perceptions, say visual or tangible, which we take as contributing to our complex ideas of the things themselves, i.e. the fig and the olive. On the one hand, we take the sweetness to be *in* the thing that we see as purple and having a bulbous, teardrop shape. On the other hand, we take the bitterness to be *in* the thing we see as bright green and having a smooth, oval shape. To our conventional way of thinking, nothing could be more obvious than that the properties we take each thing to have are separated by the length of the table. That is, the fig and the olive are, in this sense, unities—substances existing with their properties together *in* space. So, according to his opponents, we find ourselves once again in the grips of substance and inhesion. But Hume resists this inference, because if we scrutinize the means by which we come to form these ideas, we will see that there is no such pull towards substance or inhesion therein.

Hume informs us of how we come to connect these disparate ideas together in our minds by appealing to a naturalistic explanation. As we have already come to understand, what's extended cannot be locally conjoined to what's not; however, that does not debar things of the two different types being related in other ways. If we examine our ideas, what we'll notice is not a unity but rather several distinct ideas that we take to be representative of a unity, i.e. that we take to be a discrete thing in itself. Why is this the case? We take ourselves to perceive a unity because we experience these different properties together, as being co-existent. This is the result of the relation of causation. Further, we take ourselves as perceiving a unity because we experience these different properties as "co-temporary in their appearance in the mind" (T 1.4.5.12). This is the result of the relation of contiguity in time. Association of these properties over time has bred in us the habit that when we think of one property, say the taste of the fig, we immediately think of its shape and color too. Again, this is not because the taste itself conveys

anything of the fig as a whole—let alone of its shape or color—but because we have been conditioned to associate the different properties that we associate as representative of some more fundamental unity. Hume sums up the process by stating that “[w]e not only turn our thought to the conception of the other upon account of their relation, but likewise endeavour to give them a new relation, viz. that of *a conjunction in place*, that we may render the transition more easy and natural” (T 1.4.5.12).

This fictional relation of a conjunction in place can be accounted for by a naturalistic principle. When we find ourselves relating things to one another, we derive more satisfaction in the relation if we are able to associate it within a greater network of relations. We have a natural inclination to “compleat the union” and to “strengthen the connexion” as it were (T 1.4.5.12). So it is no surprise that we end up attributing incommensurable properties to some supposed thing—which is itself only the byproduct of our predilection for uniting these associated properties in our minds—when in fact this is just the effect of our minds imposing order on the array of differential contributions to our composite experience. There is a natural inclination (for the vulgar, or plain man) to conceive of these associated properties as converging on some unity, i.e. some object or thing. Philosophers take the additional step of requiring of such supposed unities that the properties we perceive inhere in some unperceived substance. The philosopher’s conclusion is not forced upon us. It arises only if we combine the vulgar’s propensity for easy and natural transitions with the philosopher’s inclination to unnecessary speculation of a metaphysical variety.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hume does not explicitly mark the difference, here, between the vulgar and the philosopher, but his treatment of his subject in this section suggests strong affinities with what he argues in 1.4.2 where he does explicitly mark the distinction. I find the distinction helpful for ease of exposition.

If we turn to a specific case (that of the aforementioned fig), we can see the error of persisting in either the vulgar's or the philosopher's manner of thinking here. Each manner of thinking, for example, with respect to the fig, leads to unintelligibility and contradiction. Both assume that there is a unity, where this amounts to situating incommensurate properties within the same space. Once we've got this far, we can see that the shadow of LCA1 is cast entirely over both positions; in fact, the issue becomes much the same as that of LCA1c. With respect to the fig, does its sweetness exist in only one part of it, or in all of it? In the spirit of LCA1c, Hume states that "[w]e cannot reply, that 'tis only in one part: For experience convinces us, that every part has the same relish. We can as little reply, that it exists in every part: For then we must suppose it figur'd and extended; which is absurd and incomprehensible" (T 1.4.5.13). This is precisely the conclusion of LCA1c—of that part of the LCA1 which was entirely of Hume's own invention as he attempted to expound the argument stages LCA1a & b.

How did either the vulgar or the philosopher end up at this point? Well, Hume recapitulates the course of arrival by saying,

Here then we are influenc'd by two principles directly contrary to each other, *viz.* the *inclination* of our fancy, by which we are determin'd to incorporate the taste with the extended object, and our *reason*, which shows us the impossibility of such an union. Being divided betwixt these opposite principles, we renounce neither one nor the other, but involve the subject in such confusion and obscurity, that we no longer perceive the opposition (T 1.4.5.13).

Whether it's the vulgar persisting in their belief in the unity of incommensurate properties, but in such a way as to remain almost entirely unreflective about the unintelligibility of what their beliefs seem to imply, or the philosopher, reflecting on this same *conundrum*, positing some unperceived substance for our perceptions to inhere in, the outcome is the same: an untenable and unintelligible set of beliefs. The dodge that Hume alludes to above relies upon our at least

tacitly accepting the scholastic principle which states that “*totum in toto & totum in qualibet parte*” (T 1.4.5.13). Hume dismisses the principle as so much nonsense by saying “[w]hich is much the same, as if we shou’d say, that a thing is in a certain place, and yet is not there” (T 1.4.5.13).

## 5. LCA2: Hume’s local conjunction argument

In the following paragraphs Hume recapitulates the foregoing arguments and problems from 1.4.5.9 – 1.4.5.13. After this recapitulation, Hume provides his own local conjunction argument, LCA2. This argument goes as follows:

### LCA2

P1. Either (1) it is the case that some things exist nowhere (i.e. all perceptions except those of sight and feeling); or (2) it is the case that perceptions that seem to exist nowhere (e.g. tastes, smells, *et cetera*) do exist somewhere, as figured and extended things; or (3) it is the case that if immaterial perceptions can be conjoined to extended things, then “the whole is in the whole, and the whole in every part” (T 1.4.5.14).

P2. 1 – 3 are exhaustive options.

P3. 2 and 3 are plainly absurd.

C. Therefore, 1 must be true.

This argument is the culmination of Hume’s inquiry into local conjunction. The upshot of it is Hume’s doctrine of Perception-Dualism. Before we examine what that doctrine amounts to, however, we should review the reasons Hume has for accepting the premises of LCA2. The first premise serves as a triple disjunction of logical alternatives. The first option is the non-location

maxim. The second option is the absurdity that everything is extended, which was ruled out by LCA1a. The third option is the absurdity that something unextended can be locally conjoined to something extended, which was ruled out by LCA1b & c. As to the second premise, the only other option I can imagine is that everything could be unextended, but of course this is ruled out by LCA1a for the very same reasons as the second option; moreover, since Hume here assumes that all parties agree that some things are extended, we can dismiss this as a live alternative to the options we have already recounted. So it seems that those options are exhaustive. We have just seen that the second and third options lead to absurdities, so the first option must be the case. In short, what's unextended cannot be locally conjoined to what's extended. Hume has, of course, provided us with a naturalistic explanation of how we come to make the mistaken judgment that *what is extended can be locally conjoined to what is unextended*, i.e. an explanation in terms of causation and contiguity in time and the habits and expectations formed in us thereof.

## **6. Perception-Dualism**

In concluding his discussion of local conjunction, Hume casts aspersions on both the materialist and the immaterialist DMS. Neither ought to find any comfort in Hume's arguments. This is because the view that falls out from these considerations cannot be taken to be strictly materialist or immaterialist. Hume's view starts with the assumption that the non-location maxim is true. From there Hume also asserts that those perceptions from sight or feeling are indeed extended. So, some of our perceptions are extended, others are not. Flage sums this up quite nicely as follows:

This provided the basis for his material/immaterial distinction. Hume proposed that impressions are to be divided into two mutually exclusive classes: (a) those that are incapable of standing in spatial relations (being directly locatable) and do not generate by combination an extension, and (b) those that are capable of standing in spatial relations (being directly locatable) and do generate extensions. They [the former] may be deemed immaterial entities, while the latter may be deemed material entities.<sup>7,8</sup>

Further, according to Flage, Hume goes on to state that “[t]he ultimate elements of experience and so the ultimate objects are to be divided into two groups, which may be called *material* and *immaterial*”.<sup>9</sup> According to Hume, perceptions can exist without support from anything else (see IA4). So we have a dualism among what Hume deems to be the “ultimate objects”, namely perceptions. We have, in short, the doctrine of Perception-Dualism.

I think that the radical nature of this doctrine has not been fully appreciated. To see this doctrine in its full garb we must take a step backwards and properly take it in as a piece within the general closet of Hume’s philosophy of mind. John Bricke argues persuasively, in his book *Hume’s Philosophy of Mind*, that Hume’s position on the mind-body problem has ultimately to be some form of dualism. Bricke argues that the alternatives to dualism either do not accord with the textual evidence or their falsity is simply an implication of the views Hume clearly develops in his philosophy. The alternatives sketched there are idealism, neutral monism, and physicalism. I agree with Bricke on this point; however, I depart from his argument when he dismisses a certain form of skepticism as a live option as well. I believe that Hume is both a skeptic and a dualist. But my interpretation of Hume allows for a more determinate answer to a question that Bricke himself posed. That question concerns just what sort of dualist Hume turns out be. (Bricke leaves that question largely unanswered in his book.) Further, Bricke highlights

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<sup>7</sup> Flage, *David Hume’s Theory of Mind*, 119-120.

<sup>8</sup> Flage puts it in terms of impressions at this point, but later adds that “[i]n drawing the material/immaterial distinction on the basis of the spatiality of impressions, Hume’s entity dualism extends to his secondary entities, ideas”. Ibid, 121.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 121.

the confused/confusing nature of Hume's comments throughout 1.4.5 as complicating matters to a still greater degree. I think that once we can state what sort of dualist Hume is, we will have in hand the means to demystify Hume's seemingly strange remarks in 1.4.5.

Bricke points out, in his discussion of the possibility of Hume being an idealist, that while Hume is committed to what Bricke calls "epistemological idealism", this does not entail that Hume is further committed to any form of metaphysical idealism of, say, the Berkeleian variety. Bricke describes the kind of epistemological idealism he has in mind here as "the doctrine that the only things one directly perceives are mental".<sup>10</sup> It is beyond doubt that Hume endorses such a doctrine, and Bricke is surely correct in his judgment that commitment to the doctrine carries with it no further metaphysical commitment, but there is still a residual problem.<sup>11</sup> What is the relationship between Hume's skepticism and his epistemological idealism? What bearing do these doctrines have on the existence of mind-independent physical objects? In short, Hume's skepticism takes off exactly at the point where his epistemological idealism leaves us. And, I believe that Hume is absolutely skeptical of the existence of mind-independent physical objects, at times referring to that hypothesis as positing a "relation without a relative"(T 1.4.5.19).

The views Hume develops in 1.4.5, and to some extent also in 1.4.6, are the most radical of his philosophy and diverge to the greatest extent from his empirical predecessors, most notably from Locke and Berkeley. Hume is working out the implications of his argument in 1.4.4, *Of the modern philosophy*, where he contends, in Bricke's paraphrase, that "[t]here are, then, no specifically physical objects that are independent of our perceptions and that continue to

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<sup>10</sup> Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind*, 40.

<sup>11</sup> That is, it is beyond doubt that Hume speaks as if talking about perceptions as "ultimate objects" of knowledge, to once again borrow Flage's phrase.

exist when unperceived”.<sup>12</sup> Hume’s skepticism informs all of his subsequent moves from 1.4.4 until the conclusion of Book 1 at 1.4.7. I do not share Bricke’s view that Hume reconciles himself to the “metaphysics of the plain man”.<sup>13</sup> Hume is bothered less by the ordinary man’s “metaphysics”, than that of the philosophers, if only because it hardly amounts to anything metaphysical at all in its highly unreflective character.

Bricke argues that, while Hume judges his skeptical arguments as irrefutable, he is not necessarily led to believe in their conclusions, in particular in the conclusion of the third skeptical argument in 1.4.4 that physical objects do not exist. Bricke states that “Hume certainly holds that the conclusion of his third argument, that there are no physical objects, cannot be believed”.<sup>14</sup> I agree with Bricke that we cannot maintain a *psychologically sustained* belief that there are no physical objects, but I do think that Hume thinks that the *philosophical* belief in physical objects must be dispensed of while we wear the mantle of philosophy, however brief a period that may be.

This is because I take Hume as maintaining a form of Pyrrhonian skepticism which permits him talk of perceptions only in the sense of presented phenomena.<sup>15</sup> His skepticism is so thoroughgoing as to seriously put in doubt his having any metaphysics whatsoever. If Hume seems to reify perceptions, it is because treating them as such allows us the most minimal form of acquiescence when philosophizing. We can talk, philosophize, analyze, relate, and so on, the content of what’s presented, but any intimation that they signify something greater beyond them is fundamentally unintelligible. Hume does admit that certain beliefs we hold are well-nigh

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>15</sup> I follow Baxter in this regard.



unshakeable, e.g. our beliefs concerning bodies, but are nonetheless philosophically excessive. So we will continue to be caused to form such beliefs and develop the requisite expectations, but this does not add up in any way to some normative endorsement of those beliefs. The Pyrrhonian will cringe when an arrow is fired in his direction, seek water to slake his thirst, and turn his eyes away from the glare of the sun, but (in the philosophical mode) he refrains from asserting that it is true that an arrow is hurtling towards him, that water is refreshing, or that the sun burns his eyes. Rather, the Pyrrhonian acquiesces in these overwhelming beliefs without asserting their truth. Hume's naturalistic project is concerned with a careful description of what seems to be the case, given what we are presented as experience, and here Hume's descriptions are implicitly qualified according to his skepticism.

Bricke is right to think that Hume is a dualist, but I wish to specify that dualism as Perception-Dualism. Hume's so-called "epistemological idealism" is a consequence of his strict empiricism, which in turn is a consequence of his Pyrrhonian skepticism.<sup>16</sup> He takes as given what's presented in experience, and, when philosophizing, he tempers his acquiescence to beliefs concerning perceptions, knowing full-well that, like everyone else, he will eventually slip back into the mode of the plain man and acquiesce to more extravagant entities than perceptions, i.e. bodies and the like. But in this philosophical mode Hume defends Perception-Dualism. He holds that there are two distinct, mutually exclusive categories into which all perceptions fall—the extended or the unextended, or what's for Hume the same thing, the material or the immaterial.

Finally, Bricke takes Hume's argument in 1.4.5 to be "elaborately paradoxical". Bricke sees Hume as primarily rejecting the traditional distinction between mind and body based upon

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<sup>16</sup> See Baxter.

the more fundamental metaphysical distinction—that of material/immaterial. Bricke's interpretation has Hume confusing a great many things:

To be sure, there are radical confusions in the arguments by which Hume reaches his conclusions: he quite misconstrues the relation between location and extension, and he commits himself to the absurd view that properties such as colour and shape may be univocally ascribed to both physical objects and perceptions.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps Hume's arguments throughout 1.4.5 *are* confusing, if we do not note that he is attempting to extend his radical project as far as it will go. However, in my view, his arguments here do not rest on his own confusions *per se*. He is desperately attempting to reach the limits of what can be intelligibly said from a philosophical point-of-view, even if this is in the end just another acquiescence, making the fewest number of metaphysical commitments—this is what I call his radical metaphysical minimalism. What drives most of this perceived confusion is taking Hume as committed to mind-independent physical objects in the first place. If we attribute to Hume the more radical implications of 1.4.4, then his defense of Perception-Dualism in 1.4.5 should strike us as not exactly being elaborately paradoxical. Rather, Perception-Dualism follows from his analysis of the distinctions between the only objects we can know anything about, even in the attenuated sense of knowing in terms of seeming.

Hume wraps up his discussion of Perception-Dualism by drawing some big-picture conclusions. He asserts that the materialist is certainly mistaken when he attempts to “conjoin all thought with extension” (T 1.4.5.15). However, the immaterialist is guilty of a different, but related mistake, when they “conjoin all thought with a simple and indivisible substance” (T 1.4.5.15). Hume takes up this problem as he moves on to his arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians. (These will be the focus of my next chapter.) Hume insists that we not take him as

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<sup>17</sup> Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind*, 44.

having given any ground to the materialist by arguing that *some of our perceptions are extended*.

Hume's arguments favor neither side of the antecedent debate. (T 1.4.5.15 – 16)

Hume's interest in the local conjunction argument, LCA1, of the immaterialist Defenders of Mental Substance is twofold. First, he accepts the argument as both valid and sound—*there cannot be any local conjunction of what's extended to what's unextended*—but he denies the unwarranted implication that the argument entails anything at all about extra-perceptual substance. Second, he uses LCA1 to illuminate a legitimate implication of the argument—the non-location maxim. Hume sketches the fig example in order to demonstrate how we ordinarily find ourselves making judgments that cannot be defended philosophically; and, then, explains in terms of causation and contiguity in time how we are naturally led to these mistakes. Hume's own local conjunction argument, LCA2, underscores the importance of the non-location maxim for denying the local conjunction of what's unextended with what's extended, while avoiding absurdity. Hume develops, in parallel to LCA2, his doctrine of Perception-Dualism. This is one of the radical implications of Hume's skeptical arguments—especially his third argument found in 1.4.4—and should be seen as a consequence of Hume's Pyrrhonian skepticism, his extreme empiricism, and the latter's attendant epistemological idealism and metaphysical minimalism.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Hume's arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians*

In this chapter I examine Hume's arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians, AST1 & AST2. He uses AST1 to establish that the infamous atheist's view of substance is fundamentally indistinguishable from those of the Theologians. This is because both Spinoza and the Theologians reduce a set of discrete entities to "one simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance" (T 1.4.5.21). If this weren't embarrassment enough for the Theologians, the very objections they acknowledge as fatal to Spinoza's philosophy can be turned right back onto their own. These objections to Spinoza that Hume wishes to use against the Theologians are facsimiles of Pierre Bayle's arguments against Spinoza. (I will refer to Hume's use of them as Bayle's Objections, or BO). Further, Hume considers whether replacing the term 'mode' with the term 'action' improves the Theologians' prospects of escaping his objections. By Hume's reckoning, using AST2, such a substitution leaves their position just as it was. Also, in the course of developing AST1, Hume proposes what I will refer to as his "Asymmetry Principle".<sup>1</sup> This principle is a crucial premise in AST1 and generally reinforces the radical project that Hume builds throughout 1.4 of the *Treatise*.

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<sup>1</sup> Flage calls this principle "'Hume's principle of theoretical objects'". Flage, *David Hume's Theory of Mind*, 8. (I shall have reason to depart from this label later on; suffice it to say now that I think Flage puts the principle to a very specific use, but that the principle need not be so restricted.)

This chapter, though, presents certain difficulties that the foregoing chapters did not. Hume seems to have only encountered Spinoza through the mediation of others, in particular through Bayle's entry on Spinoza to his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. So an inquiry into Hume's relation to Spinoza is less rewarding than the question of Hume's relation to Bayle on Spinoza. In the course of laying out Hume's arguments it is necessary to illustrate their reliance on Bayle's interpretation of Spinoza.

## **1. Hume and Spinoza**

Midways through 1.4.5 of the *Treatise* Hume uncharacteristically names his opponent—Spinoza. Hume's general tendency is to allude to his opponents' representative doctrines (e.g. Berkeley's resemblance argument, Locke's primary/secondary quality distinction) or name the school of philosophy, as it were, to which they belong (e.g. the Theologians), without naming the philosopher. The reason for Hume's making an exception of Spinoza is not obvious, and probably resolves itself into speculation. I shall say a few things that at least provide some context for Hume's decision to do so in 1.4.5.

First, Spinoza had become something of a clear and common target by this point in the early modern period. Spinoza, even if he wasn't read as often as he was disparaged, was duly famous, or if you would like, infamous. 'Spinozism' had been coined to describe any and all intellectual miscreants bold enough to defend materialism, atheism, or whatever generally threatened the establishment philosophy or religion. Spinoza's philosophy was generally

regarded as extreme. So Hume's naming Spinoza as an opponent may be nothing more than evidence of his participation in the scapegoating dialectic of his time.

Second, Spinoza starkly represents one end of the spectrum concerning the nature of substance. Spinoza's take on substance sets him apart from nearly all philosophers that came before or after him. With this in mind, it really isn't surprising at all to find a discussion of substance make mention of him and his philosophy. In fact, it would, to the contrary, be a bit strange to omit him from the discussion.

Third, Hume clearly read Bayle's *Dictionary* very closely and carefully. Many have noted Hume's connection to Bayle's entry on Pyrrho. Bayle, like Hume, was a skeptic—though of the fideistic variety—and at times a clever, insightful philosopher; so Hume found in Bayle a companionable spirit. Kemp Smith found Bayle's influence on Hume to be strong enough to devote an entire appendix to it in his book *The Philosophy of David Hume*. Given Hume's interest in Bayle, we shouldn't be too amazed that he mused on the entry for Spinoza, the single largest entry in the whole work, with special attention given by Bayle to refuting Spinoza's "monstrous hypothesis" (D Sp., remark N, 300).

Last, as we will see, Hume seems to take particular pleasure in demonstrating that the Theologians' philosophies share the same shortcomings as Spinoza's philosophy. This delight might evince on Hume's part an irascible motive—that of exposing a nice irony by reducing the Theologians' philosophy to that of one of their most abhorred antagonists, Spinoza. Since Descartes is among those whom Hume labels as one of "the Theologians", there is another irony here (albeit one beyond Hume's ken), because Spinoza self-consciously took himself to be

working out the implications of Descartes' philosophy. That is, there is good reason to think that Spinoza would have welcomed the implication.

In the end, I don't think anything definitive can be said about Hume's motive for naming Spinoza outright; but I think that all of these possibilities taken together at least provide grounds for suggesting why Hume did so. Of course, it *can* be said with conviction that Hume's main source on Spinoza is Bayle's *Dictionary*.

## 2. Hume and Bayle

Hume's three objections to Spinoza's philosophy closely resemble the objections raised by Bayle. There seems to be no evidence that Hume ever read Spinoza's works themselves; rather, he knew Spinoza's philosophy by way of intellectual hearsay, in particular from Bayle's entry to his *Dictionary*. Norton & Norton state that "[t]here is no known evidence that Hume read this work [*The Ethics*], while everything that he says about Spinoza could have been derived from Bayle".<sup>2</sup> Though Bayle defends a particularly ardent form of skepticism—i.e., fideism—Hume seems to have found Bayle's general skeptical attitude congenial, especially as evidenced throughout his entry on Pyrrho, which seems to have had a lasting impression on the young Hume. So it shouldn't be all that surprising that Hume takes his cues from Bayle when it comes to Spinoza's philosophy. Also, according to Norton & Norton, Hume was not alone in his

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<sup>2</sup> Norton & Norton, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, volume 2: *Editorial Material*, annotation to 1.4.5.18, 801.

indirect understanding of Spinoza's philosophy, and like many others his knowledge was mediated by Bayle.<sup>3</sup>

In his *Dictionary*, Bayle devotes more space to Spinoza and his philosophy than to any other subject. The entry itself is not exceptional, running about 10 pages in length, but the footnotes to the entry run closer to 40 pages.<sup>4</sup> The footnotes, for the most part, serve as an extended argument against Spinoza's philosophy by Bayle. Bayle attempts systematically to undermine all of the core claims made by Spinoza concerning God, Nature, substance, and mode. Bayle takes Spinoza's equation "God or Nature" as a "hypothesis that surpasses all the heap of all the extravagances that can be said" (D Sp., remark N, 301).

### **3. Bayle's Spinoza as made use of by Hume**

After completing his survey of the Local Conjunction Arguments, Hume informs us that though he believes all of his foregoing arguments to have been successful he cannot help but to continue to refute arguments claiming to establish the immateriality of the soul. As mentioned earlier, Hume holds that the question of the soul's immateriality is bound up with the question of its supposed substance. That is, if the soul is immaterial, then it stands to reason that its substance is an immaterial substance.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> This ratio of entry to footnotes is based on the Popkin edition. Other editions also contain Bayle's extensive quotations, and those versions of the article run to considerably greater page lengths.



The philosophical doctrines that Hume is eager to lay waste to come in two varieties. One is the familiar early modern position that the soul or mind is an immaterial thinking thing; Hume labels philosophers who subscribe to such a position as “the Theologians”. The founding father of the doctrine in the early modern period is Descartes, but the doctrine had enjoyed much fame in the time since Descartes in his Cartesian followers, especially in the philosophy of Malebranche. Further, there were the non-Cartesian defenders of the doctrine of the soul’s immateriality; these philosophers are sometimes called “the Cambridge Platonists”—prominent members being Cudworth and More. Hume was familiar with the philosophies of all of these immaterialist Defenders of Mental Substance that he indiscriminately labels “the Theologians”.<sup>5</sup> The other doctrine is that espoused by Spinoza.

Hume’s strategy is to demonstrate that there are basic metaphysical assumptions made by both the Theologians and Spinoza that entail that their respective doctrines are essentially the same. Hume declares that “the doctrine of the immateriality, simplicity, and indivisibility of a substance is a true atheism, and will serve to justify all those sentiments, for which *Spinoza* is so universally famous” (T 1.4.5.17). That is to say that—the Theologians’ pious proclamations aside—their philosophy can be indicted on the same charges with which they once convicted Spinoza’s philosophy. Hume points out that “[f]rom this topic, I hope at least to reap one advantage, that my adversaries will not have any pretext to render the present doctrine [Hume’s own doctrine] odious by their declamations, when they see that they can be so easily retorted on

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<sup>5</sup> Flage, in *David Hume’s Theory of Mind*, 72 – 9, limits the application of the label ‘Theologians’ to Descartes and the Cartesians. He argues that Hume had already disposed of the ancients’ account of substance in 1.4.3, so it would be redundant to include them within the purview of this argument. I think that mistakes part of Hume’s intention throughout 1.4.5, which is to bring to ruination all conceivable theories of substance. So, it’s all the better if these arguments also apply to the ancient doctrine of substance as well. Further, Hume in the paragraphs preceding his discussion of the Theologians had made allusion to the local conjunction arguments of Cudworth and More. It would seem that if Hume had them in mind only a few paragraphs before, that it’s unlikely that he had eschewed them along the way when these arguments are relevant to theirs as well. Hume uses the label ‘Theologians’ to stand for all philosophical doctrines committed to the existence of an immaterial soul.

them” (T 1.4.5.17). This may well be an allusion to some potential for atheism latent in Hume’s own philosophy. If it is, then this is quite the deft move.

As a preliminary to his arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians, Hume summarizes Spinoza’s philosophy. Hume understands the “fundamental principle of the atheism of *Spinoza*” as “the doctrine of the simplicity of the universe, and the unity of that substance, in which he supposes both thought and matter to inhere” (T 1.4.5.18). As long as Hume’s use of the term ‘universe’ is just a paraphrase of Spinoza’s ‘God or Nature’, there appears to be nothing objectionable in Hume’s attributing such a principle to Spinoza.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, he goes on to highlight well-known features of Spinoza’s philosophy, his account bearing hallmarks of Bayle’s entry, but not significantly distorting Spinoza’s philosophy—at least not any more than Bayle’s does. Hume concludes his summary by saying that “[t]he same substratum, if I may so speak, supports the most different modifications, without any difference in itself; and varies them, without any variation. Neither time, nor place, nor all the diversity of nature are able to produce any composition or change in its perfect simplicity and identity” (T 1.4.5.18).

With this summary in hand, Hume is ready to show how the Theologians’ position on the immateriality of the soul is essentially the same as Spinoza’s aforementioned fundamental principle. Thus, all of the objections to Spinoza’s philosophy (if they succeed) will, *eo ipso*, be objections to the Theologians’ philosophy.

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<sup>6</sup> Spinoza uses that phrase “*Deus sive Natura*”, or “God or Nature”, to refer to his ultimate substance. Spinoza intends by it to mean *God or, what is the same thing, Nature*. I read Spinoza as identifying God/Nature with reality. Hume seems to mean the same thing by using the term ‘universe’. See Spinoza’s *Ethics*, IV, Preface, II/207.

#### 4. Two preparatory arguments for AST

Hume provides two preparatory arguments before turning to his first argument against the Theologians, or AST1. The Specific Difference Argument, or SDA, is the first of the two arguments and sets up the second.<sup>7</sup> The Asymmetry Principle Argument, or APA, is the second of the two and allows Hume to make use of a novel principle that details the asymmetry between what we know about our perceptions and what we can know, in principle, about the supposed mind-independent objects our perceptions are believed by some to represent. Hume's AST1 exploits this principle in drawing its conclusion. So, we should take some time and consider the arguments for it and just what its merits are intended to be before launching into the argument which is the main focus of the present chapter.

##### 4.1 SDA: The Specific Difference Argument

Hume begins his discussion of the notion of a specific difference by hearkening back to 1.2.6.7 – 9, *Of the idea of existence, and of external existence*. There Hume first establishes his notion of a specific difference. Hume argues that:

Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. (T 1.2.6.8)

Hume in the above passage appeals to the common empiricist dictum that the mind is only ever immediately aware of its own perceptions, i.e. its impressions and ideas. The use Hume puts to this dictum, though, is far more Berkeleian than Lockean. This is because Hume intends to

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<sup>7</sup> I break SDA up into an earlier version, SDA1, found at 1.2.6.8, and a later version, SDA2, found at 1.4.5.20.

couple it with his Copy Principle to establish one of Berkeley's anti-Lockean conclusions. That is, we *cannot* conceive of anything except in terms of our own mind-dependent perceptions; and whatsoever we *can* conceive of will itself be mind-dependent; so all we will ever be left comparing are just two mind-dependent ideas. Any complex idea of a mind-independent object we are supposed to have cannot be specifically different than the perceptions from which it was ultimately derived. This is what Hume means by the phrase "specifically different" in the passage quoted above.<sup>8</sup> The Specific Difference Argument, SDA1, seems to go as follows:

#### SDA1

P1. There is nothing in the mind prior to experience.

P2. We are only ever immediately aware of our own perceptions.

P3. All ideas are copied from precedent impressions.

P4. So, it is impossible for two ideas, copied from the same precedent impression, to be specifically different.

C. Therefore, it is impossible for us to conceive of some idea,  $I_X$  (the idea of some supposed mind-independent object  $X$ ), that is specifically different from the idea of its constituent perceptions,  $I_P$ , where  $I_X$  and  $I_P$  are copies of the same precedent impression (or collection of impressions).

Premises 1 & 2 are both empiricist commonplaces, the first of which is Locke's *tabula rasa* thesis. Premise 3 is Hume's Copy Principle. Premise 4 follows from the Copy Principle: otherwise they would not be copies of the precedent impression. The conclusion appears to follow from the premises, supposing that we can make sense of an idea of the constituent perceptions that is distinct from the idea *tout court*. Hume wishes once again to demonstrate the

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<sup>8</sup> As Flage points out, others have taken "specifically different" only to mean a difference in ontological kind, e.g. the difference between a number and a pogo stick. But I agree with Flage that "[w]hether or not Butchvarov, Yolton, and Fogelin are correct in claiming that one of Hume's uses of 'specific difference' concerns difference in ontological kind, it is clear that one of his uses of that term is concerned with the more mundane differences based upon resemblances, for example, differences between tables and chairs." Flage, *Hume's Theory of Mind*, 17, endnote 3.

shortcomings of his opponents' philosophical notions, in this case the idea of a mind-independent object *as distinct from* the constituent perceptions that constitute that supposed complex idea. Hume continues by expanding on the implications of the argument by stating that:

Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imaginations to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd. (T 1.2.6.8)

Hume declares that to inquire beyond what is presented to us by our senses is unintelligible in light of our inability to conceive of anything at all that is specifically different from our perceptions. Hume adds one last gloss on this saying that the "farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects" (T 1.2.6.9). At that point in the *Treatise* Hume was not developing his skeptical arguments, but clearly he was laying the groundwork for them. The notion of having a relative idea of something without being able "to comprehend the related objects" leaves little room for reading Hume as partial to the hypothesis that there are mind-independent objects.

Hume intends to recapitulate SDA1 at 1.4.5.19, but there seems to be a rather important difference between the two versions. In the later version of the argument Hume states that:

To make this evident [that the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul is equivalent to Spinoza's "hideous hypothesis"], let us remember, that as every idea is deriv'd from a preceding perception, 'tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an object or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other. (T 1.4.5.19)

The earlier version made no mention of representation. This would alter premise 4 and the conclusion of SDA1. That is, Hume seems to deny the possibility of the idea of a perception and

the idea of an object each *representing* something specifically different. The later version of the Specific Difference Argument seems to go as follows:

### SDA2

P1. There is nothing in the mind prior to experience.

P2. We are only ever immediately aware of our own perceptions.

P3. All ideas are copied from precedent impressions.

P4. So, it is impossible for two ideas, copied from the same precedent impression, to *each represent something* specifically different.

C. Therefore, it is impossible for us to conceive of the *referent* of some idea,  $I_X$  (the idea of some supposed mind-independent object X), that is specifically different from the *referent* of the idea of its constituent perceptions,  $I_P$ , where  $I_X$  and  $I_P$  are copies of the same precedent impression (or collection of impressions).

To make sense of this approach we must take Hume as comparing the complex idea,  $I_X$ , of the supposed mind-independent object with our idea,  $I_P$ , of its constituent perceptions. So, roughly,  $I_X$  and  $I_P$  differ only with respect to  $I_P$  also containing the idea of external existence, i.e. mind-independence. If both  $I_X$  and  $I_P$  are copies of the same precedent impressions, then it is impossible for us to conceive of some specific difference in what each represent. This is because both are copies of the same precedent impressions; hence, they both represent all and only those impressions.

To suppose that we have  $I_X$ , where it contains the additional idea of external existence, is to insist on patent nonsense. Hume says as much when he asserts that “[w]hatever difference we may suppose betwixt them, ’tis still incomprehensible to us; and we are oblig’d either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression” (T 1.4.5.19). If Hume intends ‘them’ to refer to what  $I_X$  and  $I_P$

each represent, then he seems just to be insisting that two ideas copied from the same precedent impression cannot represent something specifically different. Thus, according to Hume, the mind-independence hypothesis is unintelligible, which is really just a long way around to saying something that Berkeley had already argued for with much more brevity.<sup>9</sup> But Hume's insistence here should not deter his opponents in the slightest. His rationalist opponents, again, would deny the Copy Principle. And, since the Theologians Hume is here arguing against are all Rationalists (of either the Cartesian or of the Platonic variety), Hume's insistence amounts to little more than petulant foot-stomping.<sup>10</sup>

In short, Hume is limiting representation to ideas copied from precedent impressions. But for him, given his radical empiricism, it makes no sense to even consider the possibility that impressions are themselves representations. When Hume writes that "we are oblig'd either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression", he is offering the first of the two alternatives only to highlight its nonsensicality, all the while knowing that the only reasonable conclusion to draw is the second. To conceive of something as a relation without a relative is to fail to conceive of it at all. For Hume, we know how the relation of representation works on the basis of how our ideas relate to their precedent impressions as copies—though less forceful and less lively than the original impressions. We can only make sense of the philosopher's claim that *our perceptions*

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<sup>9</sup> Berkeley argues that ideas can only resemble other ideas. Any attempt to demonstrate resemblance will always and only be in terms of more ideas. So, resemblance will always amount to the comparison of two or more ideas. See Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*.

<sup>10</sup> An empiricist opponent could well resist Hume's conclusion, but it would take more work on her part. She would have to explain how impressions could themselves be representations. Locke had attempted something like this when he propounded his Resemblance thesis, that *all ideas of primary qualities resemble their causes and all ideas of secondary qualities do not*. But, as Berkeley shows, this thesis is vulnerable once we understand that the mind is only ever immediately aware of its own perceptions; so it's not clear how we could ever know that our mind-dependent perceptions could resemble/represent mind-independent objects. It seems as though Locke could have revised his empiricism to meet this demand.

*represent mind-independent objects* by analogy; however, the analogy is fatally incomplete, because, in the absence of a precedent impression, we cannot conceive of the other *relatum*.

However, Hume's SDA1 is clearly comparing two ideas, not comparing what the two ideas represent as SDA2 puts it. The difference may be explained by the fact that earlier in the *Treatise* Hume simply had no need to consider the argument in terms of representation, taking it as obvious that the only things that ideas *could* represent are their precedent impressions. But the conclusion he draws there concerns the comparison of the properties of  $I_X$  and  $I_P$ , not a comparison of what  $I_X$  represents and of what  $I_P$  represents. It's not until we turn to the Asymmetry Principle that we get a full answer. The short answer is that it makes no difference to the argument; the long answer explains why this is so.

#### 4.2 APA: The Asymmetry Principle Argument

To introduce APA, Hume states that the "consequence I shall draw from this [SDA2] may, at first sight, appear a mere sophism; but upon the least examination will be found solid and satisfactory" (T 1.4.5.20). This warning ought to provoke in us both curiosity and suspicion.

APA goes as follows:

##### APA

P1. It is impossible for us to conceive of the *referent* of some idea,  $I_X$  (the idea of some supposed mind-independent object X), that is specifically different from the *referent* of the idea of its constituent perceptions,  $I_P$ , where  $I_X$  and  $I_P$  are copies of the same precedent impression (or collection of impressions).

P2. However, we may, *ex hypothesi*, suppose that there is some specific difference between the respective referents of  $I_X$  and of  $I_P$ .



P3. If we judge of the referent of  $I_p$  (the precedent impression or collection of impressions) that  $p$ , we cannot be certain that the circumstances that led us to judge that  $p$  of the referent of  $I_p$  are shared by the referent of  $I_x$  (the supposed mind-independent object X). That is, it is possible that the referent of  $I_p$  differs from the referent of  $I_x$  in that very particular.

P4. However, any supposed property of object X that we take as the basis for making any judgment that  $p^*$  of object X must be conceived by the mind; otherwise we could not judge that  $p^*$  of object X in the first place.

P5. And, since all judging is only ever in terms of impressions and ideas, the circumstances that lead us to make any judgment that  $p^*$  of object X must be shared by our perceptions of any supposed property of object X.

P6. So, for any judgment concerning the connection and repugnance of perceptions, we cannot know that the judgment made applies to objects; and, for any judgment concerning the connection and repugnance of objects, we can know with certainty that the judgment made applies to perceptions.<sup>11</sup>

C. Thus, all talk of the object is redundant and unnecessary; we should simply restrict ourselves to talk of the constituent perceptions.

Premise 1 of the APA is the conclusion from SDA2. APA is made just on the heels of SDA2, so Hume expects us to have that argument fresh in our minds. It is crucial to recall that there Hume reiterated his commitment to the claim that *the immediate objects of thought are always and only some perception or collection of perceptions*. Also, it is helpful to remind ourselves that for Hume, in our ordinary language we talk loosely when we speak of objects at all (e.g. talk of tables or chairs), if by that we mean to imply some identity over time. Rather, if we are slightly more careful in our language, we should talk of a collection of associated perceptions that through the relation of causation we form the habit of treating as a unity. (T 1.4.2)

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<sup>11</sup> I have included in this premise Hume's phrase "connexion and repugnance" mainly because I want to leave it open as to just how we interpret it. It seems as though minimally it concerns the suitability of comparing impressions and objects, something along the lines of similarity/dissimilarity. However, it seems to me an open question whether Hume is building anything more into the phrase, e.g. true or falsity. The interpretation of the phrase does not seem to affect the status of the premise within the argument. Loosely, we understand his point: *what we can say positively or negatively of impressions need not extend to objects, but what we can say positively or negatively about objects must extend to impressions*. And this is enough for him to draw the inference he wishes draw.

Premise 2 is the hypothesis of those who defend the claim that there are mind-independent objects granted by Hume for the sake of the argument. Hume's opponents go a step even beyond our, admittedly confused, ordinary talk and not only treat the collection of disparate perceptions as a unity, but they also take the collection to be a unitary representation of a mind-independent object. To Hume's mind, the imagined opponents are attempting an analogy from the only kind of representation Hume can make sense of (between  $I_p$  and its referent, the precedent impression or collection of impressions) to another hypothesized representational relation (between  $I_x$  and its referent, the supposed mind-independent object X).

Premises 3 – 5 aim to show that his opponents cannot state their hypothesis except in terms of perceptions; that is, their hypothesis takes for granted the presentation of the perceptions to our mind. So their hypothesis is ultimately inconceivable, as shown by the SDAs above. But even if Hume grants it, their hypothesis contributes nothing to our descriptions or explanations of our experience; hence it is unnecessary to posit the existence of mind-independent objects. Premise 6, which is really just the principle extrapolated from premises 3 – 5, is in fact his statement of the Asymmetry Principle. If what we know of our perceptions possibly does not extend to supposed mind-independent objects, and what we know of those supposed objects always will extend to our perceptions, because we cannot know anything of the objects except in terms of our perceptions, then all talk of the objects, as things in their own right, becomes otiose.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Flage, in *Hume's Theory of Mind*, 6 – 8, argues that APA is Hume's decisive statement on the meaning of theoretical terms. Flage understands Hume as defending a quite anachronistic doctrine of Meaning Empiricism, and that AST details Hume's notion of a theoretical term and how it gets its meaning from within a particular theory. I have two big-picture problems with Flage's interpretation. (1) I find it difficult to attribute to Hume a general theory of meaning on the basis of what is said throughout the *Treatise*, or for that matter anywhere else in his works, concerning language. *A fortiori*, I cannot attribute to Hume any specific theory of meaning, let alone meaning

The main objection to APA is one Bertrand Russell raised, in his book *The Problems of Philosophy*, against Berkeley's idealism. Russell argues there that:

Berkeley's view, that obviously the colour *must* be in the mind, seems to depend for its plausibility upon confusing the thing apprehended with the act of apprehension. Either of these might be called an 'idea'; probably either would have been called an idea by Berkeley. The act is undoubtedly in the mind; hence, when we are thinking of the act, we readily assent to the view that ideas must be in the mind. Then, forgetting that this was only true when ideas were taken as acts of apprehension, we transfer the proposition that 'ideas are in the mind' to ideas in the other sense, i.e. to the things apprehended by our acts of apprehension. Thus, by an unconscious equivocation, we arrive at the conclusion that whatever we can apprehend must be in our minds. This seems to be the true analysis of Berkeley's argument, and the ultimate fallacy upon which it rests.<sup>13</sup>

Though Hume is subtler than Berkeley in his drawing of the illicit inference, I think it is clear enough that he does in fact draw it. And even though Russell makes this point 173 years after Hume published the *Treatise*, there was nothing blocking any of Berkeley's or Hume's contemporaries from making the same point, except of course the persuasiveness of those two philosophers' respective arguments. This problem goes back to Locke and his initial characterization of the term 'idea' in the *Essay*. Locke states that 'idea' is:

that Term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by *Phantasm*, *Notion*, *Species*, or whatever it is, which the Mind can be employ'd about in thinking; and I could not avoid frequently using it. (E I.i.8: 47)

Locke, by claiming that ideas were the objects of thought, opened the door for Berkeley's interpretation, which Hume happily took over for him, that ideas were not in their nature

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empiricism. I think that reads into Hume a theory the Logical Positivists would have liked to have located in Hume's philosophy, but is not to be found there.

Further, Flage takes the Asymmetry Principle (he calls it "Hume's principle of theoretical objects") to be an important statement of Hume's meta-philosophical position, and he uses it in order to frame his own general approach to Hume's philosophy.

(2) This raises the question of why Hume would locate such a key principle in a single paragraph of what can be reasonably taken as his most difficult and obscure section in the entire *Treatise*. I think that Hume's ambitions for the Asymmetry Principle were far more localized. The principle restates Hume's judgment that his opponents' talk of mind-independent objects is unintelligible, provides support for his own skepticism, and, moreover, is the crux of the AST which follows in the paragraph immediately after the one containing APA.

<sup>13</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 42.

representational, but rather the *sole* objects of thought. But surely this was an oversight on Locke's part, because he is neither an idealist like Berkeley, nor a skeptic like Hume, but a realist about the mind-independent world. Locke's oversight introduced a fundamental ambiguity in his use of the term 'idea', proliferated throughout his *Essay*, that would not be fully sorted out until long after the later Empiricists had wreaked much havoc brandishing it in the name of their philosophical cause.

Hume's particular abuse of this inference is evident in both versions of SDA as well as in APA, where he attempts to maintain the distinction between the idea of the so-called "object" and the idea of its constituent perceptions. Hume wishes to show how incomprehensible his opponents' talk of mind-independent objects is, so he grants them their hypothesis, only to point out just how very limited it is. But it is Hume, not his opponents, who has got things confused. Surely our concept OBJECT and our use of the word 'object' are prior to our concept PERCEPTION and our use of the word 'perception'. So, it would appear that Hume's treatment of perceptions as objects is at best derivative. Although our apprehension of objects like tables and chairs is always by means of our ideas, it's the act of apprehension that is necessarily mental, not what is apprehended. So, to talk of perceptions as objects is to conflate *how we apprehend* some object with *what it is we apprehend*—namely, the object itself. And this confusion can be traced back to Locke's ambiguous characterization of the term 'idea'.

We should remind ourselves, too, that since APA takes the conclusion of SDA2 as its first premise, the Theologians, among Hume's opponents, would not grant that premise for the same reasons that they rejected the premises of the SDAs, i.e. denial of the *tabula rasa* thesis, denial of the Copy Principle, *et cetera*.

If my reading of Hume in 1.4.5.19 – 20 has merit, then Hume does not think that his opponents have anything but a relation without a relative—that is, a poor analogy unsupported by experience—to even state their case. Once again we find Hume adumbrating, to the best of his ability, what he judges to be unintelligible philosophy. But it's difficult to see how Hume's arguments here are any improvement upon those of Berkeley which cover the same ground. Clearly Hume's Asymmetry Principle, even if justified, only licenses epistemological inferences. His opponents though are making metaphysical claims, claims about the nature of objects. It seems then that the principle at best encourages Hume's skepticism, but cannot entirely eradicate the possibility of there being a mind-independent world.

We should note, however, that until we arrive at Hume's AST1, the discussion of the SDAs and APA appears to be something of a digression from the issue at hand—namely, Spinoza and the Theologians. In particular, the opponents so conceived in these paragraphs need not be identified as either Spinoza or the Theologians; in fact, these opponents seem to be none other than Hume's usual opponents, i.e. non-skeptical metaphysicians of any stripe. The significance of the Asymmetry Principle becomes apparent in the paragraphs which follow its introduction, where Hume makes his AST1. The principle allows Hume to demonstrate that the Theologians' position on the immateriality of the soul is indistinguishable from Spinoza's monstrous hypothesis, opening their position to the same battery of objections raised against Spinoza's philosophy.

## **5. Spinoza and the Theologians**

Once Hume has established the Asymmetry Principle, the groundwork is set in place for the argument he intends to use against the Theologians and their philosophical position defending the notion of an immaterial soul. To be clear, Spinoza is not really Hume's target; rather, the Theologians are his quarry. The Theologians, by Hume's reckoning, vehemently reject Spinozism and all it stands for in their eyes; so, if their own position can be shown to be indistinguishable from Spinoza's, then Hume has succeeded in raising a quite serious, perhaps fatal, objection to their philosophy—whatever reasons they have for rejecting Spinoza's philosophy would then in turn be reasons for rejecting their own philosophy.<sup>14</sup>

The main moves of his overall dialectic from 1.4.5.21 - 28 can briefly be stated. First, he points out that both positions posit some substance as the fundamental “ground of inhesion” for certain modes, attributes, and/or qualities (T 1.4.5.21). Second, both positions posit a universe of objects, i.e. modes or modifications of the fundamental substance. Third, according to the Asymmetry Principle, the two supposed universes of objects are indistinguishable. Fourth, the objections raised by Bayle against Spinoza can with equal force be used against the Theologians. Fifth, replacing the term ‘action’ for the term ‘mode’ does not improve their position. Norman Kemp Smith, in his book *The Philosophy of David Hume*, summarizes this nicely by stating that:

What is novel in Hume's argument [AST1] is the parallelism which he here draws between Spinoza's hypothesis and that of the widely accepted, theologically inspired, doctrine of the soul; and his consequent contention that the argument of the Theologians, in regard to the soul, can be

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<sup>14</sup> Flage, in *Hume's Theory of Mind*, 73, rather unhelpfully labels AST1 as an *ad hominem* argument, as he earlier had so-characterized IA3. The problem of doing so in both instances is that such a label insinuates that Hume is reasoning fallaciously. I do not believe that Flage in fact wants to insinuate this, but rather is keeping with the ancient label to mark Hume's allegiance to the ancient Greek tradition of skepticism. Hume's use of the argument-style is skeptical, but there is nothing fallacious about the form of his argument. I take Hume's strategy to be one of requiring the Theologians to be self-consistent. If the advocates of theory A claim that their theory is radically opposed to theory B (because it implies x); and they argue that theory B ought to be rejected because of that implication; then, if it can be shown that theory A also implies x, the principle of self-consistency demands that advocates of A also reject A for the same reasons they rejected B. Put this way, we can see some family resemblance between the argument and *ad hominem*-type arguments, but I think that the resemblance is only too superficial.

retorted upon them, with fatal effects, as shown in the atheistic consequences to which the parallel hypothesis, if consistently held, must, on the lines of Bayle's argument, inevitably lead.<sup>15</sup>

The five moves of the general dialectic can be separated into three distinct stages. Strictly speaking, the first stage is AST1, what Smith describes as “the parallelism”. At this stage Hume intends to demonstrate that, with respect to the metaphysics of substance, Spinoza and the Theologians have indistinguishable doctrines. Hume could well have left the argument at that stage, since by the Theologians own admission Spinoza's philosophy is anathema to their own. However, Hume, in keeping with the theme of 1.4.5, wishes to completely raze their position insofar as he is able. So, at the second stage, he articulates several of Bayle's objections—what I will refer to as BO1 – 3—to Spinoza's monstrous hypothesis to illuminate its unacceptable implications and, *mutatis mutandis*, the unacceptable implications of their own position. Finally, at the third stage, Hume considers a certain sort of emendation to the Theologians' position that they might take up in reply to the objections of Bayle and Hume. This emendation switches the term ‘mode’ out for ‘action’. Hume argues, using AST2, that the switch does not curtail the force of the preceding objections.

### 5.1 AST1: Hume's first argument against Spinoza and the Theologians

Hume's Argument against Spinoza and the Theologians goes as follows:

#### AST1

P1. Spinoza contends that the universe of things, e.g. porcupines, Frisbees, steak dinners, or anything else that exists, is nothing but modifications of a “simple, uncompounded, and indivisible” substance in which they inhere (T 1.4.5.21).

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<sup>15</sup> Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, 513.

P2. The Theologians contend that the universe of thought, e.g. perceptions of porcupines, Frisbees, steak dinners, or anything else that exists, is nothing but modifications of a “simple, uncompounded, and indivisible” substance in which they inhere.

P3. However, for any judgment concerning the connection and repugnance of perceptions, we cannot know that the judgment made applies to objects; and, for any judgment concerning the connection and repugnance of objects, we can know with certainty that the judgment made applies to perceptions.

P4. So, from a theoretical standpoint, both theories are positing the same universe understood in the same manner, i.e. a universe of entities which are nothing but modes of a “simple, uncompounded, and indivisible” substance in which they inhere.

C. Therefore, the Theologians’ position is indistinguishable from that of Spinoza. And whatever objections can be raised against the one can be raised with equal force against the other.

Obviously, the argument crucially turns on whether Hume has accurately represented the respective positions and whether he has sufficiently justified the Asymmetry Principle. The Cartesians posit the existence of two types of substance, material substance and immaterial substance. Even if what they say about immaterial substance is congruent with Hume’s assessment here, they would certainly take exception to the identification attempted in the first two premises with respect to material substance. For, on their view, material objects are not just modes of a “simple, uncompounded, and indivisible” material substance in which they inhere. Descartes thinks of individual objects as *causally* dependent substances, but all the same they are still substances (albeit substances dependent upon God), but not dependent upon some material substance of which they are merely modes. For Descartes and the Cartesians, the relation between material objects and material substance is not one of inhesion, but one of causal



dependence.<sup>16</sup> So, they would likely counter Hume by arguing that he is identifying the wrong set of entities as posited by the respective theories compared in AST1.

I think that the Cartesians can justly follow this up by charging that Hume himself had got it right when he first introduced the Asymmetry Principle as a principle most would consider a “mere sophism”, because that is what it is, a mere sophism (T 1.4.5.20). Hume’s sleight of hand from APA, concerning the necessity of conceiving of any object in terms of perceptions, would not induce a Cartesian into falling for the trick. This is because they have grounds to reject all of the premises of SDA1 & SDA2, both of which are presupposed by APA in its derivation of the Asymmetry Principle. Hence, they have grounds for roundly rejecting the Asymmetry Principle, which is premise 3 of AST1. They do not hold that the mind is a *tabula rasa* and thereby would not think the Copy Principle to be true, as evidenced by their defense of Nativism. They do not necessarily hold that the mind is only ever immediately aware of its own perceptions—at least not in Hume or Berkeley’s sense. Descartes himself was indeed a representational realist; so I see no in-principle reason that Descartes could not have made Russell’s distinction between *the act of apprehension* and *the thing apprehended*. I think that this provides much doubt that the Cartesians would grant Hume his Asymmetry Principle, which is doing all of the heavy-lifting of AST1.

The Cambridge Platonists fare only slightly worse than the Cartesians in having the appropriate rebuttals to Hume. Their peculiar form of idealism does leave them open to the very kind of identification that AST1 requires; so it’s hard to see how they could reject premises 1 and 2. That said, though, they accept a Platonic form of Nativism and so too would have grounds for rejecting the SDAs, APA, and premise 3 of AST1. In short, AST1 is a disaster from the start.

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<sup>16</sup> See Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I.

However, that Hume took it to be sound is quite obvious when in the next paragraph he states that “[b]ut tho’ this argument, consider’d in general, seems evident beyond all doubt and contradiction, yet to make it more clear and sensible, let us survey it in detail; and see whether all the absurdities, which have been found in the system of *Spinoza*, may not likewise be discover’d in that of the theologians” (T 1.4.5.22). The survey that Hume alludes to in this quotation is that which covers three objections to Spinoza’s monstrous hypothesis that Hume takes over from Bayle. Hume believes that he has with AST1 established the indistinguishability of the two systems, so he now desires to show that the grave implications of the one doctrine also follow from the other.

### 5.2 Hume’s use of Bayle’s objections to Spinoza

The futility of AST1 in striking anything like a crippling blow to Hume’s intended foes is all too apparent—calling it a glancing blow might even be too much. Therefore, examining Hume’s rehearsal of Bayle’s objections to Spinoza as a prelude to the recital he intends to conduct for the Theologians’ position might seem less than altogether worthwhile, but this is mistaken. Hume uses Bayle’s arguments in such a manner that they may succeed independent of the failure of AST1. However, as we shall see, it’s questionable that Bayle’s original arguments posed too many troubles for Spinoza in the first place. If Hume cannot improve those arguments, and if they in any way rely upon the success of AST1, then BO1 – 3 may well be dead on arrival.

The first of these arguments, BO1, targets the incompatibility of extension with a notion of substance thought of as “simple, uncompounded, and indivisible”. BO1 goes as follows:<sup>17</sup>

### BO1

P1. According to Spinoza, a mode is not distinct or separate from its substance. That is, an extended object is not distinct or separate from the simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance, i.e. Spinoza’s “*Deus sive Natura*”.

P2. So, the extension of the object must be identified with the extension of the simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance.

P3. But this is impossible; because either the simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance would have to expand to the extension of the object, entailing that it would no longer be simple, uncompounded, and indivisible; or, the extended object would have to contract to be simple, uncompounded, and indivisible with its substance, entailing that it would no longer be extended.

C1. Therefore, we should reject premise 1, Spinoza’s monstrous hypothesis.

C2. Given AST1, the same objection can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for the Theologians.

The argument is a fairly straightforward *reductio*, but its effectiveness turns on a misunderstanding of Spinoza’s claim that *everything is in some sense a mode of a single simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance*. Spinoza’s claim requires understanding his distinction between finite mode and infinite mode. Yitzhak Y. Melamed summarizes this when he says that:

Finite modes are just parts of a certain infinite totalities which Spinoza calls “infinite modes.” These infinite modes, as opposed to the substance and attributes, are divisible. Napoleon is neither a part of God, nor is he God entirely. Napoleon (and any other finite mode) is just a part of a property, an infinite mode, which belongs to God entirely. In the present case, Napoleon’s body is part of the totality of bodies, which is an infinite mode of Extension. It is this infinite mode of Extension which belongs to God entirely. Similarly, Napoleon’s mind is part of the infinite

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<sup>17</sup> BO1 corresponds to Bayle’s argument titled “*That according to Spinoza God and extension are the same thing*” (D Sp., remark N, I, 302). Bayle’s arguments, here and throughout remark N, are far more prolix than Hume’s rehearsals of them. Though Hume fashions his versions of the arguments in his own style and language, each argument remains consistent with Bayle’s reasoning.

intellect, the totality of ideas and the infinite mode of Thought; the infinite intellect is a property which belongs to God entirely.<sup>18</sup>

So, a proper understanding of premise 1 of BO1 would block the subsequent inferences of the *reductio*. I know that Hume only came across Spinoza's philosophy in a second-hand manner, but one of the dangers of doing so is running the risk that what one is told second-hand is not the whole story. Hume can be justly reproved for that.

Further, Spinoza on this point seems to be, by his own lights, cleaning up Descartes' treatment of substance and mode.<sup>19</sup> Thus, there is nothing but their own lack of ingenuity preventing the Theologians of the Cartesian persuasion from taking a similar line. Moreover, the Theologians, of both camps, have the same grounds, respectively, for denying the identification of their position with Spinoza's as adumbrated above in section 5.1. Also, it stands to reason that none of the Theologians would grant that perceptions are themselves extended, which as we have seen is part and parcel of Hume's Perception-Dualism. The reason I bring this up is that when Hume draws the second conclusion of BO1, the necessary changes required for his identification concern perceptions and extension. So, I think Hume may, here, be implicitly drawing upon the non-location maxim.

Hume's second argument, BO2, concerns the concept SUBSTANCE that we are supposed to possess. BO2 goes as follows:<sup>20</sup>

## BO2

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<sup>18</sup> Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication", 51.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 27 – 31.

<sup>20</sup> BO2 corresponds to Bayle's argument titled "*That extension is composed of parts which are each a particular substance*" (D Sp., remark N, I, 305).

P1. If we possess the concept SUBSTANCE, then it applies to matter.

P2. So, if we possess the concept DISTINCT SUBSTANCE, then it applies to all distinct portions of matter.

P3. So, matter is not a mode of substance, but is conceived to be a substance itself; *a fortiori*, then, distinct portions of matter are not modes of substance, but are conceived as substances themselves.

C1. Thus, Spinoza's monstrous hypothesis contradicts the common philosophical concept of substance, because it collapses the distinction between substance and mode, and thereby ought to be rejected.

C2. Given AST1 and IA3, the same objection can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for the Theologians.<sup>21</sup>

The similarity between the considerations motivating IA3, as described in Chapter 1, and those motivating premises 1 – 3 and conclusion 1 of BO2 is plain. Hume, again, is assuming for the sake of argument that we have some concept of substance. As he argued earlier, Hume does not think that we have any idea, concept, or notion of substance, because all such ideas, concepts, or notions are fundamentally unintelligible. But even if he grants the concept, Spinoza's monstrous hypothesis runs afoul of it.

However, once we appreciate this point, Hume urges us to consider the case of the Theologians. They too are using the concept of substance, when applied to the universe of thought, when they say that ideas are modes of the immaterial substance. But for the same reasons that Spinoza's use of the concept of substance fails to mark the distinction it sets out to distinguish—between substance and mode—they too fail accordingly.

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<sup>21</sup> IA3, if we recall, is the argument Hume used to show that the definition of 'substance', coupled with the Separability Principle & the Criterion of Conceivability, entails that the definition (and for that matter the concept SUBSTANCE behind the definition) applies to all perceptions, including properties. Thus failing to distinguish between substance and mode. (IA3 can be found on page 30.)

Descartes can respond that Hume is here assuming, fallaciously, that anything that can be separated by the mind is distinct and that whatever is so conceived can exist unsupported, as it were. The reason this is fallacious is that, if we recall, Descartes makes a distinction between *merely being separable by the mind* and *being clearly and distinctly conceived of as separable* (Sixth Meditation: CSM II, 78 – 9). I can separate a ball’s yellowness from its roundness in my imagination, but I cannot clearly and distinctly conceive of its yellowness as existing without inhering in any substance at all. So, Descartes could well retort that it is Hume, not himself or the Theologians, that is abusing the concept of substance and failing to make the appropriate distinctions. Also, the Theologians could avail themselves of Spinoza’s distinction between finite modes and infinite modes.

The third argument, BO3, concerns the incompatibility of contradictory properties inhering in the same substance. BO3 goes as follows:<sup>22</sup>

### BO3

P1. According to Spinoza, a mode is not distinct or separate from its substance. That is, any particular object is not distinct or separate from the simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance.

P2. So, at any given time, there are at least two modes of the simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance that have contradictory properties.

P3. The round ball *currently* on my bookshelf and the square box of tissues *currently* on my desk do have contradictory properties.

P4. But if Spinoza’s monstrous hypothesis is true, then these properties are both predicated of two modes of the same simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance at the same time; but this is impossible.

C1. Therefore, we ought to reject premise 1.

C2. Given AST1, the same objection can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for the Theologians.

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<sup>22</sup> BO3 corresponds to Bayle’s argument titled “*Incompatible modalities require distinct subjects*” (D Sp., remark N, I, 306 – 7).

Much has been written on Bayle's version of this argument and just how far it goes in providing a serious objection to Spinoza's philosophy. Melamed lucidly states what I take to be the correct analysis of Spinoza on this issue as follows:

Obviously, for Spinoza, God does not love and hate honey in the same respect. While God *qua* Napoleon loves it, God *qua* Josephine hates it. Spinoza developed this respects-analysis into a genuine art. In numerous places he asserts that a thing may have a certain property *quatenus* (insofar as) it is X, and a different (or even opposite) property *quatenus* it is Y. Thus, I can have a causal relationship with a certain body, say a flamingo, insofar as I am an extended thing, but, insofar as I am a mind, I have no causal relationship with any body (but only with ideas of bodies). It is simply not in the same respect that I am, and I am not, causally related to (the body of) the flamingo.<sup>23</sup>

Hume, following Bayle, is appealing to the law of non-contradiction in BO3. But he does seem to have run roughshod over the clause "in the same respect" as Melamed points out. Spinoza's grounds for taking Hume to be seriously distorting his philosophy is strengthened even more if he were to invoke the finite mode and infinite mode distinction here too. In what is becoming a familiar refrain, the Theologians would be wise to take their cue on this issue from Spinoza.

BO1 – 3 in the end do not prove to be the decisive objections Hume hoped they would be. Part of the problem is that the arguments, as originally propounded by Bayle, do not pose serious problems for Spinoza. Hume's ignorance of the details of Spinoza's philosophy accounts for much of this. Hume's AST1 failed to make the identification that Spinoza and the Theologians have the same metaphysics of substance. But as our study of BO1 – 3 shows, the identification of the metaphysics of substance actually improves the Theologians' chances of decisively rebutting Hume's objections—especially of those Theologians of the Cartesian persuasion.

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<sup>23</sup> Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication", 50. See also Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics".

### 5.3 AST2: The amendment to the Theologians' position

The final stage of Hume's arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians begins with him claiming that "[i]t appears, then, that to whatever side we turn, the same difficulties follow us, and that we cannot advance one step towards establishing the simplicity and immateriality of the soul, without preparing the way for a dangerous and irrecoverable atheism" (T 1.4.5.26). He believes that he has by this point demonstrated that the Theologians' position on substance is identical to Spinoza's, and that Spinoza's philosophy leads necessarily to atheism, and so that the Theologians' position must as well. So, he imagines them anxiously searching after some way to get out of the snares he has laid for them. The basic idea of how Hume imagines they might amend their position, hoping that such an emendation will secure their escape, is that Hume has put too much emphasis on the term 'mode'. They might argue that to use 'mode' to classify ideas in their philosophy is, strictly speaking, not entirely appropriate. Rather, they might contend that we should substitute 'action' for 'mode' and thereby clear up the misunderstanding of their philosophy that enabled Hume to raise his objections. On this view of things, the term 'action' classifies ideas as abstract modes of substance, abstractions from substance. Hume characterizes an action or abstract mode in this sense as "something, which, properly speaking, is neither distinguishable, nor separable from its substance, and is only conceiv'd by a distinction of reason, or an abstraction" (T 1.4.5.26). (Of course, if I'm right, then they really should not be so dejected as to be desperately searching after some means of recourse.)

Hume muses on this possible amendment to their philosophy. The result of his musings is his second argument against Spinoza and the Theologians, or AST2. AST2 goes as follows:



## AST2

P1. If our perceptions were actions or abstract modes of substance, then they would not be conceivable as separable, distinct existences.

P2. Our perceptions, i.e. impressions and ideas, are different, distinguishable, and separate from each other and everything else that exists or could be imagined to exist.

C. Therefore, we cannot conceive of our perceptions as actions or abstract modes of substance.

Hume holds that premise 1 follows from their own notion of action or abstract mode. Premise 2 is justified for Hume by the Separability Principle and the Criterion for Conceivability. And the argument itself is a simple *modus tollens* syllogism. At this point I am repeating myself, but the Theologians would deny the Separability Principle and thus reject premise 2.

Hume takes the extra measure of showing that an analogy to motion will not aid the Theologians. The idea is that the relation between an idea and its immaterial substance is like that between motion and the object moved. Hume dismisses this by asserting that:

The instance of motion, which is commonly made use of to show after what manner perception depends, as an action, upon its substance, rather confounds than instructs us. Motion to all appearances induces no real nor essential change on a body, but only varies its relation to other objects. But betwixt a person in the morning walking in a garden with company, agreeable to him; and a person in the afternoon enclos'd in a dungeon, and full of terror, despair, and resentment, there seems to be a radical difference, and of quite another kind, than what is produc'd on a body by the change of situation. (T 1.4.5.27)

The two events Hume describes are wildly different for the person experiencing them, but not insofar as they are moving. The change of situation makes a difference only insofar as the situation affects the mind of the person having the respective experiences, i.e. causes them to have various ideas. So, the analogy with motion does not help. On the contrary, according to Hume, changes in perceptions seem to change the mind essentially.

I think Hume's explanation of the analogy is confounding. The analogy is supposed to make sense of the relation of an action or abstract mode to its substance; and conceived of in this way the relation is but a distinction of reason. I agree with Hume in that it is difficult to see how such a move would alter the Theologians' position in any important way, but I take it that the burden on them would really be to explain away Hume's sense that there is a "radical difference" that does not seem to be based on a relative change of position.

Perhaps the Theologians would provide a different analysis of motion, or a better example, or even explain Hume's example properly in their own terms. This is far too hypothetical to extend much further. Regardless, Hume's example seems ill-conceived and he would do well explain just what it is he intends the example to illustrate. All I can make of it is that the important differences between the two situations concern the mind and ideas of the person and not so much the relation to the surrounding objects—it is in virtue of the person's ideas that a garden is judged preferable to a dungeon, not anything inherent in the different objects that constitute the respective places. So, if our ideas relate to their substance as motion to its substance, then the analogy breaks down. This is my best guess as to what Hume intends here. Hume follows this by reiterating that we, of course, do not have an idea of substance, so to think we could make sense of an action as it is supposed to relate to this unknown I-know-not-what is pointless.

Hume reminds us that even his opponents make use of the kind of reasoning he employs in AST2 when they proclaim that supposed mind-independent objects are separable and distinct from each other. But as I mentioned above, Hume is relying upon a quite different notion of separability than are the Theologians. Hume makes a summary judgment that "[t]he use, therefore, of the word, *action*, unaccompany'd with any meaning, instead of that of *modification*,

makes no addition to our knowledge, nor is of any advantage to the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul” (T 1.4.5.27).

Hume adds as an addendum to AST2 that even if it improves the Theologians’ lot in some unknown manner, he has already proven with AST1 that their position on substance is indistinguishable from Spinoza’s; so, Spinoza could just as easily avail himself of the same tactic. Hume thinks he has shown that the emendation to their position concerning substituting ‘action’ for ‘mode’ cannot work, but he declares that:

I own ’tis unintelligible; but at the same time assert, according to the principles above-explain’d, that ’tis impossible to discover any absurdity in the supposition, that all the various objects in nature are actions of one simple substance, which absurdity will not be applicable to a like supposition concerning impressions and ideas. (T 1.4.5.28)

Hume’s confidence in such a declaration is sadly undeserved. The arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians are far from convincing on just about every level imaginable.

Hume’s relation to Spinoza is through Bayle’s *Dictionary*. There are several reasons we can conjecture that may have motivated Hume to make so much of Spinoza’s philosophy, but in the end these are at best just conjectures. Hume’s reading of Bayle’s treatment of Spinoza prompts him to draw a parallel between the metaphysics of substance of Spinoza and that of the Theologians, providing him with yet another means of impugning the claim that the soul is immaterial. To prepare the way for Hume’s arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians, he makes two arguments, SDA2 and APA, that give us the strategic blueprint of his impending

attack. From these arguments Hume derives the Asymmetry Principle, which serves as the crux of AST1. AST1 attempts to prove that the positions of Spinoza and the Theologians are fundamentally indistinguishable. There are serious and deep reasons why we should think that AST1 fails in its task. Hume moves on from AST1 claiming victory, ready to show his opponents the wasteland that is their former position in the aftermath of AST1. At this point Hume attempts to argue that the atheism entailed by Spinoza's monstrous hypothesis is also entailed by their own view. These arguments, BO1 – 3, assume the success of AST1, and so should not prove to be problematic for his opponents. Further, there are reasons to think that even Spinoza's philosophy is left unharmed by them as well. Finally, Hume imagines his opponents trying to evade his arguments by making an amendment to their position. He argues in AST2 that such an emendation to their position is futile. He may be correct in this judgment, but their position is not in need of any such amendment, due to the failure of the SDAs, APA, and AST1.

Hume's arguments against Spinoza and the Theologians are interesting extensions of Hume's general dialectic in 1.4.5. The argumentative style and strategy is of a piece with the radical project of 1.4—namely, his extreme skepticism and its attendant radical metaphysical minimalism. But the success of these arguments is bound far too tightly with assumptions Hume cannot reasonably assume his opponents will grant him. Study of them exposes a series of creative maneuvers that draw out Hume's ill-fated race to the limits of philosophy.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Hume's arguments concerning mind/matter causation*

In this chapter I examine Hume's argument that mind/matter causation not only is possible, but in fact is obviously the case. This general dialectic serves as one of the common themes for most of the early modern philosophers. Hume enters the fray long after its inauguration, principally through the works of Descartes and Hobbes. By the time of Hume, the debate had become for the most part quite lopsided, in favor of doctrines claiming that in one way or other mind and matter *did not* causally interact. Hume surveys the received arguments purporting to show that mind/matter causation is impossible. Hume argues that these arguments are in the end unsound. Hume urges us to consider the case of mind/matter causation as merely an instance of causation generally, and he contends that the same considerations that informed his earlier discussion of causation in *Treatise* 1.3 can be brought to bear on this special case. He argues, that is, that the question of mind/matter causation is but a question of constant conjunction and the association of ideas. Hume provides two arguments, AMMC1 & AMMC2, which purport to demonstrate that mind/matter causation is not only possible but indeed is the best explanation for the deliverances of our experiences.

### 1. The context of the issue of mind/matter causation in 1.4.5

The issue of mind/matter causation arrives abruptly in 1.4.5. Hume, for the most part, leaves it to us to catch just why the issue is relevant to the foregoing issues of substance, local conjunction of mind and matter, and the arguments of Spinoza and the Theologians. The main issue throughout 1.4.5 is, of course, substance. And Hume, after completing his intelligibility arguments, tells us repeatedly that he believes those arguments to have been decisive. But even so, he goes on taking on new arguments. His opponents tie the issue of substance to the issue of the soul's being immaterial—hence this is why Hume titled this section *Of the immateriality of the soul*. Hume thinks that the question of the soul's being immaterial is principally a matter of the issue of the soul's substance. However, because his interlocutors have framed the debate in terms of the immateriality of the soul, Hume has taken their arguments in that manner and as they come.

The structure of 1.4.5 represents the various ways his opponents have tried to defend the claim that *the soul is immaterial*. In this manner they argue that the impossibility of mind/matter causation demonstrates that mind and matter must be essentially different types of substance.<sup>1</sup> If the mind were material, then mind/matter causation ought to occur in the same manner as causation occurs between any two material things. But such is not the case. So the mind must be immaterial. Hume wishes to utterly demolish his opponents' arguments concerning the substance of the soul. By attacking their arguments against mind/matter causation, he has just another opportunity for razing their philosophy entirely.

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<sup>1</sup> It's unclear *exactly* who Hume takes to be his opponents here, because not all of his other opponents in 1.4.5 deny mind/matter causation—in particular Descartes does not. Although, most of the later Cartesians certainly fit the bill, as well as the Cambridge Platonists.

His pride and exuberance in his own arguments against the Defenders of Mental Substance, or DMS, betrays an unjustified confidence in his own philosophy. This confidence is not over anything positive, i.e. what we know, but is entirely negative, i.e. concerning what we don't know. And this is itself another form of dogmatism. There's some reason to think that Hume is getting caught up in this negative dogmatism at this point in 1.4.5 and turning from one dogmatic issue of his opponents to another, while in the end trading them for his own negative, skeptical dogmas.

## **2. The background of the issue concerning mind/matter causation**

Many philosophers in the early modern period argued against the possibility of mind/matter causation, which many of those same philosophers connected to the hypothesis of thinking matter.<sup>2,3</sup> Descartes had left the connection between mind and matter wholly mysterious; however, it's clear that Descartes believed that there was mind/matter causation, so he posited some type of mind/matter interactionism.

The inadequacy of Descartes' remarks concerning mind/matter causation engendered a long train of doctrines among the Cartesians and other early modern philosophers, each of which was intended to rectify the issue. Malebranche tried to resolve the difficulties inherited from Descartes by developing his occasionalism.<sup>4</sup> This doctrine claimed that "all creatures, finite

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<sup>2</sup> I treat mind/matter causation as the claim that *mind can and sometimes does cause material effects and matter can and sometimes does have mental effects*. This is the manner in which Hume seems to understand the issue, and it does not seem to me that early modern philosophers seriously considered the possibility of any form of epiphenomenalism.

<sup>3</sup> Hobbes was the lone proponent of materialism at this time. He seemed to accept some sort of strong reductionism about mental states being material. See *Leviathan*, Book I.

<sup>4</sup> See Malebranche's *The Search after Truth*, Book VI: Part ii, Chapter Three.

entities that they are, are absolutely devoid of any causal efficacy, and that God is the only true causal agent”.<sup>5</sup> So, for Malebranche, there, of course, was no mind/matter causation, because there was no real causation at all independent of God. Spinoza also tried to resolve Descartes’ confusions by defending his doctrine of mind/body parallelism. This doctrine entails that, while mind and body (extension) are two of “God or Nature’s” infinite attributes, they are causally independent of one another while remaining parallel in all respects. So, for Spinoza, mind causes mind, and matter causes matter, and the successions of causes is in each case perfectly parallel without any mind/matter interaction, as it were.<sup>6</sup> Leibniz himself made yet another attempt to untie this Gordian knot with his doctrine of pre-established harmony. Leibniz argued that mind and matter were set in harmony by God such that they always appear in sync, while strictly speaking being causally independent of one another.<sup>7</sup>

Locke, unmotivated by the rationalism of the foregoing philosophers, officially proclaimed neutrality on the issue of mind/matter causation. But he admits the possibility of mind/matter causation in passing. Locke states that:

We have the *Ideas of Matter and Thinking*, but possibly shall never be able to know, whether any mere material Being thinks, or no; it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own *Ideas*, without revelation, to discover, whether Omnipotency has not given to some Systems of Matter fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think, or else joined and fixed to Matter so disposed, a thinking immaterial Substance: (E IV.iii.6: 540 – 1)

Locke countenances here the possibility of thinking matter alongside the possibility, almost universally defended by Locke’s contemporaries, that human bodies are adjoined to immaterial

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Nadler, “Malebranche on Causation”, 115.

<sup>6</sup> See Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Part II, “Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind”.

<sup>7</sup> See Leibniz’ *Discourse on Metaphysics*, *New System of the Nature of Substances and their Communication*, and of *the Union which Exists between the Soul and the Body*, and *Monadology*.



souls. He develops the first possibility into something of a hypothesis: that God, if he so chooses, could make matter think by fiat. Locke continues by saying that:

It being, in respect of our Notions, not much more remote from our Comprehension to conceive, that GOD can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking, than that he could superadd to it another Substance, with a Faculty of thinking; since we know not wherein Thinking consists, nor to what sort of Substances the Almighty has been pleased to give that Power, which cannot be in any created Being, but merely by the good pleasure and Bounty of the Creator. (E IV.iii.6: 541).

Locke's hypothesis, then, appears to be on a par with that of the received view about the immateriality of the soul and its being adjoined to the material body. His remarks suggest a skepticism about the true nature of thinking. Given our ignorance, Locke argues that since both possibilities lie within God's omnipotence, we cannot be dissatisfied with either hypothesis in the absence of more insight. Locke caught much flak for these comments at the time; his enemies intimated that Locke must be a secret Hobbesian, i.e. a materialist and an atheist.

Hume, as we shall see, pushes Locke's hypothesis further, indicating that not only is it a coherent possibility, but we have every reason to think it true that there is mind/matter causation. Of course, Locke's hypothesis is put in terms of the possibility of thinking matter, but, *mutatis mutandis*, a similar point can be made for mind/matter causation. Thus, Hume is entering once more into metaphysical debate that occupied the attention of most of the great philosophers of the early modern period.

### **3. The received arguments concerning the impossibility of mind/matter causation**

Hume introduces his discussion of mind/matter causation by stating that “[f]rom these hypotheses concerning the *substance* and *local conjunction* of our perceptions, we may pass to another, which is more intelligible than the former, and more important than the latter, viz. concerning the *cause* of our perceptions” (T 1.4.5.29). According to Hume, the received view is one which claims that mind/matter causation is impossible. The version of the argument he considers is quite simple, but he takes pains to elaborate for us just why his opponents, the deniers of mind/matter causation, regard this argument as valid and sound. The received argument for the Impossibility of Mind/Matter Causation, or IMMC, goes as follows:

### IMMC

- P1. If mind/matter causation were possible, then mind/matter causation would be conceivable.
- P2. Mind/matter causation is not conceivable.
- C. Therefore, mind/matter causation is impossible.

Hume’s opponents, here, believe that premise 1 is true presumably because they take it to follow from the Criterion of Conceivability. The Criterion of Conceivability is usually depicted as entailing that *whatever is conceivable is possible*; however, premise 1 of IMMC is making a very different claim, namely, that *whatever is possible is conceivable*.<sup>8</sup> We can envision a strong version of the Criterion of Conceivability that amounts to a bi-conditional to the effect that *something is conceivable if and only if it is possible*. We do not have to delve too far into these matters now, mainly because Hume himself does not, but the second conditional is far from self-evident—much depends on just what is built into the relevant notions of conceivable and possible. Suffice it to say that Hume endorses the first conditional, and puts it to use frequently

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<sup>8</sup> These conditionals are quite simple and probably need to be further explicated. I take it that to be conceivable, here, is *to be conceived in a certain manner*; and, to be possible is *to possibly exist in that same manner*.

in the *Treatise*, without necessarily being committed to the second. Regardless, he seems to grant his opponents the premise.

The second premise is taken to be justified in a number of ways. Hume describes his opponents justifications of premise 2 of IMMC as amounting to the claim that “[m]atter and motion...however vary’d, are still matter and motion, and produce only a difference in the position and situation of objects” (T 1.4.5.29). He attributes to his opponents three reasons for holding premise 2 true and then details a thought-experiment intended to do the same. The first reason is that no matter how many times we divide a material body the result of the division is just more material bodies, i.e. nothing mental emerges. The second reason is that no matter what figure we put a portion of matter into the result is just another figure or relation of parts, i.e. nothing mental emerges. The third reason is that no matter how we move a portion of matter the result is just motion or change of place, i.e. nothing mental emerges.

The thought-experiment urges us to imagine some piece of matter, *m*, moving in a circle. Surely, then, the result would just be *m* moving in a circle. But, if premise 2 were false, then it’s conceivable that a change of direction, shape, or speed could produce something mental. For instance, now imagine moving *m* in the opposite direction and in an ellipse. Those who think that premise 2 is false would have us believe that such a change could result in “a passion or moral reflection” (T 1.4.5.29). ’Tis absurd to imagine, say Hume’s opponents:

That the shocking of two globular particles shou’d also become a sensation of pain, and that the meeting of two triangular ones shou’d afford a pleasure. Now as these different shocks, and variations, and mixtures are the only changes, of which matter is susceptible, and as these never afford us any idea of thought or perception, ’tis concluded to be impossible, that thought can ever be caus’d by matter. (T 1.4.5.29)

This quotation shows that at least Hume understands his opponents as accepting the strong reading of the Criterion of Conceivability, but as I said Hume does not object to IMMC regarding its first premise. Rather, it is the second premise with which he finds fault. Hume holds that nothing could be easier than conceiving of mind/matter causation, so premise 2 of IMMC must be false.

#### **4. AMMC1: Hume's Argument for Mind/Matter Causation**

Hume dispatches IMMC with very little trouble. He points out that previous philosophers have generally failed adequately to appreciate the nature of causation. His remarks hearken back to the much-celebrated 1.3 of the *Treatise*. In that part of the *Treatise*, Hume concerned himself with, among other topics, causation, necessary connection, induction, and the kind of naturalistic explanations with which he has come to be associated. He exploits the full arsenal of resources manufactured there to argue for the thesis that there is mind/matter causation. Hume's Argument for Mind/Matter Causation, or AMMC1, goes as follows:

##### AMMC1

- P1. There is no necessary connection between causes and effects; the reason we believe this is because of their constant conjunction in our experience.
- P2. All objects, which are not contrary, are capable of constant conjunction.
- P3. No real objects are contrary, and thus they are capable of constant conjunction.
- P4. Causation is matter of constant conjunction.
- C1. Therefore, anything can be the cause of anything else.

C2. Thus, any material object can be the cause of any mental object, and *vice-versa*.

Hume argued for each of these premises in 1.3.<sup>9</sup> To recapitulate, Hume holds that premise 1 is true because the statement that “there is a necessary connection between causes and effects” is either a matter of fact or a relation of ideas. If it’s a relation of ideas, then its negation would be a contradiction. But the negation of it, “there is not a necessary connection between causes and effects”, is not contradictory. We can conceive of causes having different effects than we normally observe them to have. So, the original statement must be a matter of fact. But if it is a matter of fact, then it could turn out otherwise, because all matters of fact are contingent. Further, we only think we have the idea of a necessary connection because we experience causes constantly conjoined to effects over a period of time, producing in us the expectation that such a constant conjunction will be preserved in the future. However, we know through reason that the conjunction may be severed in the future. So, the notion of a necessary connection is psychological, not metaphysical.

In premise 2 Hume talks of objects, but this should certainly include events. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, Hume is thinking about causes and effects, i.e. events. Only contrary objects are excluded, but Hume thinks that real objects can never be contrary. By ‘real objects’ Hume intends the objects of experience—existing things. As we have seen, for him, this ultimately means *perceptions*. But his argument can be pitched at the level of objects or events for whatever ontology you like. (Taking a bite of a banana could cause the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius; there is no contradiction in supposing so.) So, it seems that premise 3 follows from

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<sup>9</sup> Hume also argues for these premises in sections 4 – 7 of the first *Enquiry*. Since I have set as my task the interpretation of 1.4.5 of the *Treatise*, I have tried to avoid bringing in Hume’s arguments and discussions found in the first *Enquiry* unless absolutely necessary. Also, for present purposes, I wish to take no stance here on the relationship of the *Treatise* to the first *Enquiry*. I’ll have a little to say about this relationship in my next chapter.

premise 2. In 1.3.15, Hume speaks to premise 4, and in so doing also to premise 2, by asserting them as principles to the effect “*that the constant conjunction of objects determines their causation, and that properly speaking, no objects are contrary to each other, but existence and non-existence*” (T 1.3.15.1). That is, there is nothing more to our notion of causation than constant conjunction and no existing things can be contrary to one another, but only to their own non-existence. Conclusion 1 states that, *a priori*, any object or event can be the cause of any other object or event. That is, we look to experience to inform us of what causes what and so on concerning causation. So, as conclusion 2 makes explicit, matter can be the cause of mind, and mind can be the cause of matter.

Hume, however, is not satisfied in merely proving that mind/matter causation is possible; he intends to show that we have every reason to believe that it happens all of the time. His move here is simple. He needs to produce instances of constant pairings of objects or events, where one is mental and one is material, each of which type is sometimes in the role of cause and sometimes in the role of effect. He argues that we have ample evidence of such pairings *via* our experience. Hume states that:

For tho' there appear no manner of connexion betwixt motion or thought, the case is the same with all other causes and effects. Place one body of a pound weight on one end of a lever, and another body of the same weight on another end; you will never find in these bodies any principle of motion dependent on their distances from the center, more than thought and perception. If you pretend, therefore, to prove *a priori*, that such a position of bodies can never cause thought; because turn it which way you will, 'tis nothing but a position of bodies; you must by the same course of reasoning conclude, that it can never produce motion; since there is no more apparent connexion in the one case than in the other. But as this latter conclusion is contrary to evident experience, and as 'tis possible we may have a like experience in the operations of the mind, and may perceive a constant conjunction of thought and motion; you reason too hastily, when from the mere consideration of ideas, you conclude that 'tis impossible motion can ever produce thought, or a different position of parts give rise to a different passion or reflection. (T 1.4.5.30)

I said earlier that Hume was not concerned with premise 1 of IMMC but with premise 2. Premise 1 seemed to be the second conditional of the strong reading of the Criterion of Conceivability, which read that *whatever is possible is conceivable*. I think that I was right, but the above passage seems to indicate that Hume may well implicitly reject it—at least understood in a certain way. It seems that Hume is here telling us that because AMMC1 is valid and sound (his first argument *for* mind/matter causation) we have reason to think that our notion of what's conceivable is quite parochial. Since we rely upon experience to relate to us various pairings of objects or events as constantly conjoined, we fail to appreciate just what is possible regarding such pairings. And we also start with a notion of possibility likewise hamstrung by our notion of conceivability.

Hume argues that we should not bother ourselves here with the question of the union of mind and body—viz. the local conjunction of a mental substance with that of a material substance—if for no other reason than that he has already argued that the idea of substance is unintelligible and that Perception-Dualism is true. If we attend to our experience, then it is obvious that our passions are constantly conjoined to movements of our bodies. Physical damage to our limbs is constantly conjoined to psychic trauma in our mind. The extended perceptions we receive from our senses of sight or touch are constantly conjoined to unextended passions or sentiments of the mind.<sup>10</sup> Hume's point is clear: we have sufficient evidence to conclude that mind/matter causation is not only possible, but that it is indeed the case.

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<sup>10</sup> We should recall here Hume's discussion of his example of the fig from 1.4.5.11 – 13.

## 5. AMMC2: The dilemma

Once Hume concludes his defense of AMMC1, he imagines two alternatives on the issue of causation. From the consideration of these alternatives Hume constructs a dilemma for his opponents. However, in this particular case, he seems to intend for Malebranche to be the target of this argument, AMMC2. AMMC2 goes as follows:

### AMMC2

P1. There are two alternatives concerning the nature of causation: (1) there is Hume's contention that causation is but constant conjunction, so anything can be the cause of anything else; (2) there is Malebranche's contention that there must be a necessary connection in order for us to judge that *x causes y*, or that *x is the cause of y*, so there is no true causation in the world but for God's will.

P2. Malebranche rejects alternative (1) of premise 1 and accepts alternative (2) of premise 1.

P3. However, if there is not true causation in the world, then we cannot even assign to God an active causal power, because our notion of God is derived from experience of the world. But, as we are told, our experience of the world communicates no true notion of causation to us.

P4. Furthermore, if there is not true causation in the world, and we simply grant that God's will is the only active causal principle, then this implies that God is responsible for all of the evil and viciousness in the world as well as all the good and virtuousness.

P5. However, Malebranche cannot accept premises 3 & 4 *and* alternative (2) of premise 1, because doing so entails untenable implications for his philosophy.

C1. Therefore, even by Malebranche's own lights, alternative (2) of premise 1 is false and alternative (1) of premise 1 must be true.

C2. Thus, anything can be the cause of anything else.

Hume takes premise 1 to be exhaustive, because he assumes that he has already demonstrated in 1.3 that causation in the world can only be explained in terms of constant conjunction; so, it is then either the case that *there is true causation in the world* or that *there is not true causation in*



*the world*. The dilemma, then, is set up such that we see the unwelcome implications of alternative (2) of premise 1 which do not follow from alternative (1) of premise 1. This is yet another example of Hume assuming his opponent's position and providing an internal critique of it. Malebranche, according to Hume, cannot consistently maintain his position on causation *and* his position on God and God's attributes. Assuming that Malebranche's position concerning God and God's attributes is more fundamental and important for his philosophy, Hume seems to think that Malebranche has to now reject his occasionalist account of causation of which alternative (2) of premise 1 of AMMC2 is a necessary component.

The weakness of AMMC2 is premise 3. If true, premise 3 *would* entail an untenable implication for Malebranche's philosophy. This is because, while he denies that there is true causation in the world (to use Hume's terminology, pairings of supposed causes and effects that we observe in the world which are but occasions for God's will to make its determinations), he does make God into the only active causal principle. But Malebranche would not grant Hume's implication that *we could not even assign to God this power, because our ideas of causation all derive from our experience of a world without true causation*.<sup>11</sup> Malebranche, as a good Cartesian, can stand pat and assert that our ideas of God and/or causation are innate, thus rejecting Hume's implication. But Hume tries to justify premise 3 in another manner. Nadler puts Hume's justification of premise 3 nicely when he writes that:

Hume's stunning maneuver is to turn Malebranche's arguments right back on occasionalism itself. Hume argued that there can be discovered no more necessary a connection between the divine will and an event than between any other two things. All objects and events, including divine volitions

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<sup>11</sup> Hume boldly remarks that "[a]s to what may be said, that the connexion betwixt the idea of an infinitely powerful being, and that of any effect, which he wills, is necessary and unavoidable; I answer, that we have no idea of a being endow'd with any power, much less of one endow'd with infinite power" (T 1.4.5.31). With quotes like that it's no wonder Hume appended an *apologia* to the end of this section.

and their objects, are, if truly discrete, really and logically separate from one another, and none implies the existence of any other. To claim otherwise, he insisted, is simply to beg the question.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, Malebranche cannot avoid premise 4, because it *does* appear to have unavoidable implications for his view, and quite unacceptable ones at that. So, AMMC2's conclusions follow even if we jettison premise 3. Perhaps the argument isn't quite as strong as it would have been, but, then again, we have no good reason to think that AMMC1 didn't already establish the same conclusions independent of the success of AMMC2. And, for that matter, Hume's justification for premise 3 of AMMC2 can be interpreted along the lines that Nadler does, restoring to the argument its full power. Such a tactic sets aside Hume's initial *a posteriori* objection and supplants it with a more solid *a priori* one.

Hume pronounces summary judgment upon the issue of mind/matter causation:

Thus we are necessarily reduc'd to the other side of the dilemma, viz. that all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoin'd, are upon that account only to be regarded as causes and effects. Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary; it follows, that for aught we can determine by the mere ideas, any thing may be the cause or effect of any thing; which evidently gives the advantage to the materialists above their antagonists (T 1.4.5.32).

The last clause is telling. Hume gives the advantage to the materialists, thus moving well beyond Locke's mere hypothesis. This is not to say that Hume is actually sympathetic to the materialists, but that their thesis is at least intelligible and coherent, whereas the immaterialist's thesis is not. I think that Hume is needling the immaterialists much more here than offering the crown to the materialists.

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<sup>12</sup> Nadler, "Malebranche on Causation", 135.

## 6. The *apologia*

The last two paragraphs of 1.4.5, paragraphs 34 and 35, are offered by Hume to assuage the worries of whosoever found the least bit of 1.4.5 irreligious. His *apologia* to this effect is wholly unconvincing. Hume tells us that philosophy ought to always make way for religion whenever the two are at odds, and that careful scrutiny of his claims will prove that he has said nothing contrary to religion. He is evidently alluding to the implications of what he has said for the issue of the immortality of the soul. It's hard to imagine an ecclesiastical authority finding succor in Hume's Pyrrhonism. Hume allows that our knowledge is extremely limited about all matters beyond our own experiences, so his philosophy leaves it quite open as to issues of a religiously transcendental nature. Further, though Hume never published it in his lifetime, he did write an essay he considered for inclusion into the first Enquiry, "On the Immortality of the Soul". There, Hume argues that none of the metaphysical, moral, or religious arguments for the immortality of the soul are ultimately convincing. So, I think that his *apologia* at the end of 1.4.5 is nothing more than a diversionary tactic he hoped would be enough to appease the ecclesiastical authority.

It should not be surprising that Hume dipped into the issue of mind/matter causation. First, it had become quite a lively topic in early modern philosophy, running from Descartes to Locke and beyond. Second, Hume's special interest in causation gives him particular insight into the issue.

Third, the issue is certainly related to the other topics of 1.4.5: the immateriality of the soul, the substance of the soul, the local conjunction of mind/matter, *et cetera*.

Hume examines the received argument for the impossibility of mind/matter causation, IMMC. He forcefully objects to premise 2 of it by means of his first argument for mind/matter causation, AMMC1. This argument seems to be successful, but as is Hume's wont he goes still further. He takes on Malebranche's specific argument for the impossibility of mind/matter causation. Hume provides us, then, with his second argument for mind/matter causation, AMMC2. All things considered, AMMC2 is also successful. So it would appear that Hume has ample reasons to think that he has established that there is indeed mind/matter causation.

Hume's treatment of this issue is once again in keeping with his radical project of 1.4 of the *Treatise*, in particular his extreme skepticism and its attendant radical metaphysical minimalism. Also, he has argued here in a systematic manner, utilizing principles and arguments that he put to good use elsewhere in the *Treatise*.

## CHAPTER 5

### *The relationship between 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 of Hume's Treatise*

In this brief chapter I aim to illuminate the connection between Hume's arguments in 1.4.5 and those of 1.4.6, *Of personal identity*. In particular, Hume's argument for his bundle theory account of personal identity is striking in the resemblance it bears to his intelligibility arguments which I discussed in detail in chapter 1. Some of Hume's commentators have not sufficiently marked the dependence of his arguments in 1.4.6 on those found in 1.4.5; and when it is mentioned, 1.4.5 is not emphasized as key to interpreting the arguments of 1.4.6. I contend that the same motivations that prompted the arguments of 1.4.5 are quite alive in 1.4.6. That is, Hume's treatment of personal identity is certainly part of his radical project in 1.4, *Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy*. I wish only to sketch out the case for this. It is not my intent to give a sustained reading of 1.4.6 in its own right. Furthermore, I would add, that my interpretation provides some purchase on the issue of Hume's so-called "recantation" in the Appendix to the *Treatise* and his omission of the topics in both 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 from the first *Enquiry*.

#### 1. 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 in the secondary literature

Hume's discussion of personal identity in 1.4.6 has received much attention ever since the *Treatise's* publication. There is no shortage of articles, chapters, and even entire books on Hume's views therein. However, there has not been anything like the same kind of attention paid to 1.4.5. Most commentators have noted that Hume's arguments in 1.4.6 presuppose acquaintance with his views on other matters. Corliss Gayda Swain, just to take her article "Personal Identity and the Skeptical System of Philosophy" as an example, writes that:

Because Hume, often implicitly, but sometimes explicitly, compares his views on personal identity with his views on other metaphysical issues, especially causation and external objects, one cannot achieve a full understanding of Hume's theory of personal identity without understanding those views, the discussion of which takes up much of Book I of the *Treatise*.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have a commentator making a perfectly reasonable point that we should appreciate Hume's views on other metaphysical matters if we hope to fully understand his account of personal identity; but the examples she gives concern causation and external objects, not substance. While it is important to appreciate Hume's views on those issues, it is surprising that Swain makes no mention of what seems to be of the utmost importance to Hume's account of personal identity, namely, his views on substance. Hume's argument for his bundle theory is tantamount to a denial of the existence of a substantial self. That is, Hume's account of the self is an immediate implication of his views on substance. Just as the notion of substance, generally, is unintelligible for Hume, *a fortiori*, the notion of a personal substance or self is unintelligible. I use Swain's article only as an example.

My claim is not that every commentator has failed to notice the relationship between 1.4.5 and 1.4.6, but that it is often overlooked. Even when it is not entirely overlooked, only a

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<sup>1</sup> Swain, "Personal Identity and the Skeptical System of Philosophy", 133.

cursory amount of attention is given to the specific arguments in 1.4.5.<sup>2,3</sup> Moreover, the view of substance Hume develops in 1.4.5 puts severe constraints on what views of personal identity we can attribute to Hume.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The connection between Hume's intelligibility arguments and his bundle theory

The main argument that Hume provides in 1.4.6 for his bundle theory is really an implication of his intelligibility arguments. If we recall, one of the main moves in those arguments—as is in many other of Hume's arguments—is posed in the form of a challenge: show us the precedent impression if you would like us to take seriously that we have some idea. Here, as he does elsewhere, Hume invokes the Copy Principle to sort out issues concerning the possession of ideas. It is not enough, according to Hume, to pronounce that you have some idea, you also carry the burden of producing, as it were, the precedent impression from which the purported idea was copied. In the absence of the impression we lack grounds for thinking that we indeed possess the idea. Earlier, in 1.4.5, Hume uses the Copy Principle in IA1 to provide an *a priori* case against our having an idea of substance. Let us recapitulate IA1:

### IA1

P1. If we have an idea of something, then we have a precedent impression of that same thing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the commentators who do not overlook but do not properly assess the dependence of 1.4.6 on 1.4.5 are Garrett, Kemp Smith, McIntyre, and Pears.

<sup>3</sup> Notable exceptions to this are Bricke, Broackes and Flage.

<sup>4</sup> Also, many philosophers who are not strictly speaking Hume scholars, but have an interest in Hume on personal identity, have mistakenly treated Hume's discussion there as if it were *sui generis*.

P2. We do not have a precedent impression of mental substance.

- (a) The only means of representation for an impression is by resemblance.
- (b) An impression cannot resemble a substance.
- (c) So, our impressions cannot represent mental substance.
- (d) Therefore, we cannot have an impression of mental substance.

C. Therefore, we do not have an idea of mental substance.

With little effort we can see that Hume's argument for the bundle theory account of personal identity is only a tweaked version of IA1. The Bundle Theory Argument, or BTA, goes as follows:<sup>6</sup>

#### BTA

P1. If we have an idea of something, then we have a precedent impression of that same thing.

P2. We do not have a precedent impression of *a substantial self*.

- (a) If we had a precedent impression of a substantial self, then that impression, or complex of impressions, would have to be single, constant, and invariable; because the supposed "self" of the philosophers is taken to be single, constant, and invariable.
- (b) No impressions are constant and invariable, and the purported evidence for the so-called "self" of the philosophers is not some single impression but manifold perceptions related by causation and resemblance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hume often explains the Copy Principle in terms of a single idea and a single impression, which can be misleading. He certainly countenances the possibility of there being complex impressions. I take it that Hume, in the above premise, reckons that such a complex, if it were the original of our idea of a substantial self, would have to be single, constant, and invariable. He, of course, does not believe this to be the case. This notion of a complex of impressions, though, is not at all what he has in mind later in the argument concerning a manifold of resembling, causally related perceptions. That sort of manifold is constantly changing and is individuated not by identity but by those relations of causation and resemblance.

<sup>6</sup> BTA is the argument that Hume makes at 1.4.6.2.

<sup>7</sup> David Pears argues, in his book *Hume's System*, that, though Hume attempts to explain this so-called "self" only in terms of causation and resemblance, it seems that causation itself requires an appeal to contiguity in time—resulting in an apparent inconsistency. Pears tries admirably to make sense of the third relation's absence from 1.4.6;



(c) Thus, we do not have a precedent impression, or a complex of impressions, of a substantial self.

C1. Therefore, we do not have an idea of *a substantial self*.

C2. So, whatever notion of “self” we do have is the product of associating those manifold perceptions produced by causation and resemblance.

We can see that IA1 and BTA are quite similar. Both are *modus tollens* arguments. They share the same first premise, which is an instance of the Copy Principle. And both concern our having an impression of substance. Of course, BTA concerns a particular purported substance, a substantial self, but a substance nonetheless. The main difference between IA1 and BTA is that of the content of their respective sub-arguments for each argument’s second premise. In effect, both sub-arguments are *reductios*, differing only with respect to the content of the *reductio*—namely, resemblance, on the one hand, and singularity, constancy, and invariability, on the other.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, BTA draws a second conclusion, providing the upshot of a bundle theory, but my point is well-established: these arguments bear an arresting family resemblance to one another.

Hume, in the next paragraph, turns to the specific question of our perceptions. He asserts that “[a]ll these are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and may be separately consider’d, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their

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however, nothing in my chapter necessitates such a resolution, so I shall leave Hume’s stated reliance on only causation and resemblance intact.

<sup>8</sup> The sub-argument for premise 2 of BTA also brings to mind the challenge raised in IA2 as well. The second premise of IA2 reads that “If we have an impression of mental substance, then the DMS [Defenders of Mental Substance] could give a determinate account of that impression”. Hume argued there that they could not. The challenge of the sub-argument for premise 2 of BTA alludes to an inability on the part of his interlocutors to provide a determinate account of an impression of a substantial self, that is, one which would be single, constant, and invariable—hence, determinate.

existence” (T 1.4.6.3). In so doing, Hume is retracing his IA3. IA3, if we remember, went as follows:<sup>9</sup>

### IA3

- P1. Whatever can be clearly conceived could exist.
- P2. Whatever can be conceived as such could exist as such.
- P3. Everything that is different is distinguishable; and everything that is distinguishable can be conceived of as a separate entity.
- P4. Our perceptions, i.e. impressions and ideas, are different from one another.
- P5. So, our perceptions are separable by the imagination.
- P6. So, we can conceive of our perceptions existing in the absence of anything else in the same manner in which they actually exist.
- P7. The definition of substance: “*something which may exist by itself*”.
- C. By the Defenders of Mental Substance’s own definition, perceptions are substances.

Hume earlier had used IA3 to demonstrate that the definition of ‘substance’ given by the Defenders of Mental Substance proved too much by their own standards, because it entails that nearly everything is a substance, and if that is the case, then they cannot use the notion of substance to mark the difference between substance and mode.

However, Hume deftly shows that he can just as well embrace the conclusion and its implications. So, we might as well treat perceptions as substances, and since our purported idea of a “self” is nothing but a collection of perceptions related by causation and resemblance, then this so-called “self” is nothing but a bundle of perceptions, as it were. As Hume puts it: “But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind [those who think they have a notion of a

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<sup>9</sup> In 1.4.6.16, Hume again uses the key inferences of IA3, i.e. those concerning separability and distinguishability.

substantial self], I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.” (T 1.4.6.4) If we emphasize “nothing but” in our reading of the above passage, then Hume’s Perception-Dualism cannot be far behind.

Later on in 1.4.6, Hume, when discussing in detail how it is we come to attribute identity and a continued existence to a “self”, states that:

Thus we feign the continu’d existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation. But we may farther observe, that where we do not give rise to such a fiction, our propension to confound identity with relation is so great, that we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, beside their relation; and this I take to be the case with regard to the identity we ascribe to plants and animals. And even when this does not take place, we still feel a propensity to confound these ideas, tho’ we are not able fully to satisfy ourselves in that particular, nor find any thing invariable and uninterrupted to justify our notion of identity. (T 1.4.6.6)

This passage utilizes the kind of argumentation that Hume developed in 1.4.2, which he also used to similar effect in 1.4.5 when discussing the example of the fig. Hume takes us to be making an analogy between our “self” and the kind of identity over time that we mistakenly attribute to plants and animals. Since that kind of identity is confused and misleading, we should not at all be surprised that the analogy is but a poor one thereof. Furthermore, Hume explicitly identifies the question of the self with that of the soul and substance.

Finally, Hume also connects the themes of 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 in the Appendix to the *Treatise*. There he writes that:

When we talk of *self* or *substance*, we must have an idea annex’d to these terms, otherwise they are altogether unintelligible. Every idea is deriv’d from preceding impressions; and we have no impression of self or substance, as something simple and individual. We have, therefore, no idea of them in that sense. (T Appendix 11)

And:

Whatever is distinct, is distinguishable; and whatever is distinguishable, is separable by the thought or imagination. All perceptions are distinct. They are, therefore, distinguishable, and separable, and may be conceiv'd as separately existent, and may exist separately, without any contradiction or absurdity. (T Appendix 12)

These quotes demonstrate that even when Hume was writing the Appendix he still took the intelligibility arguments of 1.4.5 as the principle justification for his conclusions about the “self”.

Again, it is not my intention in this chapter to provide the kind of critical exegesis of 1.4.6 and its arguments that I have for 1.4.5, but rather to highlight the considerable similarities between the two. I think that the evidence is overwhelming. Hume uses the arguments of 1.4.5 to establish his conclusions throughout 1.4.6.

### **3. Hume's bundle theory as yet another extension of his radical project**

Like the other arguments developed in 1.4 of the *Treatise*, Hume's bundle theory is of a piece with his radical project. This radical project is that of extreme skepticism and an absolutely minimal metaphysics. In these sections Hume argues against our having grounds to posit the existence of material objects, substance, and of an immaterial soul. He, therein, provides his reductive, naturalistic accounts of Perception-Dualism and mind/matter causation, all the while doggedly maintaining his extreme skeptical stance. He also uses his full battery of philosophical principles such as the Copy Principle, the Separability Principle, the principle of Constant Conjunction, and the Asymmetry Principle, which he introduces in 1.4.5. Hume's account of

personal identity fits right in with all of this. He denies the existence of a substantial self. He gives us his bundle theory. He explicitly draws on all of the aforementioned principles, when relevant.<sup>10</sup> Hume's treatment of personal identity is but an extension of his treatment of substance generally.

#### **4. Hume's reservations about personal identity and the omission of the topics found in 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 from the first *Enquiry***

In the Appendix to the *Treatise*, Hume seems to reveal some reservations about his account of personal identity. It is important to note that Hume does not so much recant his bundle theory as provide some reasons for concern. Hume admits that upon further reflection he has discovered an inconsistency of which he is presently unable to dispose. He writes that “[i]n short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences*” (T Appendix 21). This quotation comes at the end of a rather lengthy recapitulation of Hume's stance on substance and the “self”. He trots out the selfsame arguments I have been discussing throughout this chapter; in fact, the arguments do not appear in the Appendix differently rendered than in their sections of origination, 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 respectively. Hume states, there, that he accepts the arguments as well as their seeming implications.

This passage has long been the source of puzzlement among Hume scholars. The chief reason for this puzzlement is that these two principles, as Hume describes them, are not in fact

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<sup>10</sup> Since the Asymmetry Principle targets extra-perceptual judgments, and the subject of 1.4.6 concerns only perceptions, no reference to the Asymmetry Principle was in fact necessary.

inconsistent with one another. This has led most scholars to attempt to provide some other claim that Hume is committed to, either explicitly or implicitly, in the course of developing his bundle theory that accounts for Hume's self-reported inconsistency.<sup>11</sup> However, none of the proposals along these lines have proved to be altogether convincing. Another type of interpretation has been lately produced to explain Hume's puzzling remarks, while also acknowledging the futility of the traditional type of interpretation.<sup>12</sup> This new type of interpretation understands Hume as lamenting the fact that he was wrong at the beginning of 1.4.5 to pronounce that the intellectual world was free of contradictions in ways that the natural world is not. Hume's initial optimism about the mind was not justified. The intellectual world, therefore, is not exempted from the threat of contradiction, so we must yet again find our way to skepticism.<sup>13</sup> The kind of inconsistency to which Hume alludes in the Appendix does not concern the logical status of those two propositions. Rather, the inconsistency is the result of two different tendencies of the imagination: (1) its tendency to associate ideas by resemblance; and, (2) its tendency to associate ideas by causation. Our imagination, when applied to its own operations, is no less prone to generating contradictions as it is when applied to the operations of that which is supposed by some to be outside of the mind.<sup>14</sup>

I want to suggest that Hume has arrived at this point because of his commitment to pushing the limits of philosophy as far as he can. His negative metaphysics is just as radical

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<sup>11</sup> Although I am not here trying to provide a full reading of the Appendix to the *Treatise*, Garrett's chapter on personal identity in his book *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* is quite helpful and gives a thorough survey of most of the interpretations of the issue concerning the relationship between 1.4.6 and the Appendix. Garrett also develops there his own novel interpretation. Many of these, Garrett's especially, are quite ingenious but lack something with respect to their plausibility.

<sup>12</sup> See Swain's "Personal Identity and the Skeptical System of Philosophy" and McIntyre's "Hume and the Problem of Personal Identity".

<sup>13</sup> McIntyre supports this interpretation further by arguing that (1) Hume never says that he recants anything in the Appendix to the *Treatise* and (2) there is evidence in Hume's later works, e.g. the first *Enquiry*, the *Dialogues*, and in his two late essays "Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul", of his continued commitment to the bundle theory.

<sup>14</sup> McIntyre, "Hume and the Problem of Personal Identity", 198 – 9.

throughout these sections of the *Treatise* as Spinoza's positive, or constructive, metaphysics are in his own philosophy. It is my contention that Hume pushed his skepticism and its attendant radical metaphysical minimalism too far long before we arrive at the Appendix. In short, Hume's unabashed use of his Copy Principle, Separability Principle, and the Criterion of Conceivability in the service of unrelenting skepticism led him inexorably to this point. His radical project cannot ultimately be sustained. The inconsistency mentioned at the close of the Appendix is evidence of this fact. Of the two principles articulated there, it is the former that is generating most of the problem. That principle, *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences*, is a consequence of IA3, which is probably Hume's most controversial use of the Separability Principle. Whichever type of interpretation you take on the so-called "recantation" in the Appendix, it seems to me that Hume's worries are the direct result of his extreme skepticism and his radical metaphysical minimalism.

In the same spirit, I think we can read Hume's omission of the topics of substance and of personal identity from the first *Enquiry* as perhaps also being the result of his pushing the limits of philosophy in 1.4 of the *Treatise*. Now, there are other reasons that just as well account for Hume's decision to omit these topics from the *Enquiry*. It is not my concern here to delve into all of them. However, two conjectures seem to me to be quite reasonable. First, the *Enquiry* was intended for a general audience, so Hume sought to tone down the more difficult passages or to omit them entirely. These two sections, 1.4.5 and 1.4.6, are exceedingly difficult and abstract. So, they seem fit for exclusion from a work intended for the general public. Second, Hume may well have come to regard the radical skepticism and the extreme metaphysical minimalism as, in the end, unsustainable. So, he may have decided that he had indeed gone too far in these

sections. We cannot really know, but just as the same motivations prompt the arguments from both sections, the same problems attend both of them as well.

However, there is some evidence for the second conjecture. In section 12 of the *Enquiry*, Hume expatiates on skepticism at length. There, he explains the motivations for, and shortcomings of, several schools of skepticism, admiring all the while many of their clever arguments.<sup>15</sup> The traditional view is that these ancient schools of skepticism split over the fact that the Academic skeptics, those who had come to prominence in Plato's Academy, were in the end dogmatists themselves, denouncing various philosophies as false and their arguments unsound or poor. The Pyrrhonians took the position that all claims were doubtful, even the claim that *all claims are doubtful*, and that we ought to withhold assent from all claims. Nature forces certain beliefs on us, and to those beliefs we must acquiesce, but we should not ever go so far as to assert that those beliefs, in which we find ourselves forced to acquiesce, are true or false.

As Baxter points out, Hume seems to mischaracterize Pyrrhonian skepticism.<sup>16</sup> Hume seems to understand the Pyrrhonians as withholding belief on all matters, which Hume judges to be "causally impossible".<sup>17</sup> However, he is clear that some sort of mitigated skepticism is a potential boon for the "just reasoner" (EHU 12.24). If we allow for this adjustment, that Hume is misinformed in his understanding of Pyrrhonian skepticism, then Hume's later skepticism is consistent with the Pyrrhonians' wish to avoid dogmatism at all costs, including the negative dogmas of the Academic skeptic, i.e. assertions that *this* or *that is not the case*. Hume argues that the role of skepticism is to oppose dogmatic philosophies in that it would "naturally inspire them

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<sup>15</sup> In the course of section 12 of the *Enquiry*, Hume details the Antecedent skepticism of Descartes, the Consequent skepticism of Sextus Empiricus, the "ingenious" skeptical arguments of Berkeley, the devastating skepticism of Pyrrhonism, and the useful Mitigated, or "Academical", skepticism which he ultimately endorses.

<sup>16</sup> Baxter, Donald L.M., in his forthcoming "Assent, Reason, and Hume's Pyrrhonian Empiricism", 1 – 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



[dogmatists] with more modesty and reserve, and diminish their fond opinion of themselves, and their prejudice against antagonists” (EHU 12.24). Further, Hume states that “if any of the learned be inclined, from their natural temper, to haughtiness and obstinacy, a small tincture of PYRRHONISM might abate their pride, by showing them, that the few advantages, which they may have attained over their fellows, are but inconsiderable, if compared with the universal perplexity and confusion, which is inherent in human nature” (EHU 12.24).<sup>18</sup> Hume, in this section of the *Enquiry*, instructs us that this mitigated skepticism places the proper constraints on our inquiries, limiting us to abstract reasoning concerning quantity and experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact. Nature is the only antidote to skepticism generally, and this mitigated skepticism provides the “proper subjects of science and enquiry” (EHU 12.26). These proper subjects unsurprisingly belong to that in which we must acquiesce with respect to our beliefs, i.e. what nature has come to see as fit for our believing.

It is my judgment that part of Hume’s decision to omit the subjects of 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 from the *Enquiry* can be explained by his careful reassessment of his own skepticism. Hume came to understand that much of what he argued for in those sections approached negative dogmas, which he found incompatible with his implicit Pyrrhonian skepticism. His attitude about the positive dogmas of substance and self never changed, as is evidenced by the passing things he later says on those subjects in the *Enquiry*, “Of Suicide”, “Of the Immortality of the Soul”, and in *Dialogues*. What changed was his presentation of those issues in terms of being emphatically dogmatic in his dismissal of them. Nature does not lead us to acquiesce in our beliefs with respect to substance or self, and none of the arguments by the dogmatic philosophers

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<sup>18</sup> Though Hume uses the term “Pyrrhonism” in the above passage, he qualifies his endorsement by recommending only “a small tincture” of it, and in so doing he still evinces a misunderstanding of Pyrrhonism. He fails to fully endorse it precisely because he takes it to require withholding belief on all matters.

can be defended on rational grounds, so we must withhold our assent from their attendant claims. This would also mean that much of his extreme skepticism and radical metaphysical minimalism overstepped the bounds of careful Pyrrhonian skepticism and into the territory of the negative dogmas of the Academics.

Understanding section 1.4.5, especially its intelligibility arguments, is crucial for understanding Hume's bundle theory. Some of Hume's commentators have neglected this connection, while others have simply not given it its due regard. The similarities between Hume's intelligibility arguments and those for the bundle theory are striking. His bundle theory is of a piece with his radical project of 1.4 of the *Treatise*. There is some reason to think that Hume's reservations about personal identity and his omission of the topics of 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 from the first *Enquiry* betray a recognition on his part of how far he had tried to go beyond the limits of what can be said in philosophy. His skepticism is still the refuge to which he retreats, but that he could explain away all metaphysical pretensions in his accustomed manner may have proved to be too ambitious a project in the end. Hume's extreme skepticism—that is, his Pyrrhonian skepticism—in 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 becomes a form of Academic skepticism, which leads him to assert negative metaphysical theses that his Pyrrhonism cannot license. If Hume were to be careful, then he must refrain from turning his extreme skepticism into another form of dogmatism, albeit a negative dogmatism.

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